

ABSTRACT

Contextualization of Public Worship Practices in Vietnamese Protestant Churches of the Greater Ohio Valley Region

by

Dennis G. Crump

The influx of Vietnamese immigrants into the United States has resulted in the founding of Vietnamese Protestant congregations in various regions of the country. This research addresses the way in which the worship practices of some of these congregations have been contextualized in order to enhance ministry of Vietnamese congregations either in the United States or overseas. Specifically, it aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how the public worship practices of Vietnamese Protestant churches in the greater Ohio Valley (Kentucky, Indiana, Ohio and Tennessee) reflect contextualization – especially that which is appropriate for Vietnamese people.

The study addresses these categories of public worship: prayer, praise, and confession of sin, confession of faith (including Baptism), reading of scripture, preaching, the Lord's Supper (Holy Communion), offertory collection and occasional services. Contextualization of worship in each of these categories was researched with the exception of weddings and funerals (two types of occasional service).

The study looks at contextualizations found in the worship practices of six Vietnamese churches in the region and provides an assessment of the appropriateness of those contextualizations. It also explores the compatibility of these practices with the six models of contextual theology. The final chapter summarizes the study's conclusions, discusses their implications, and provides recommendations for further research.

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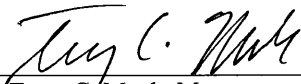
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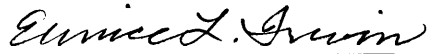
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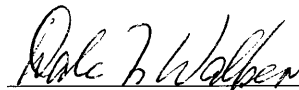
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----|
| Chapter 1 – Research Overview | 1 |
| Background of the Study | 1 |
| Statement of the Problem..... | 3 |
| Research Claims and Questions..... | 3 |
| Significance of the Research..... | 5 |
| Literature Review..... | 6 |
| Methodology..... | 15 |
| Theoretical Framework..... | 22 |
| Ethical Considerations in the Research Design | 28 |
| Definitions of Key Terms | 29 |
| Chapters Overview..... | 31 |
| Chapter Summary | 32 |
| Chapter 2 – The History and Culture of Vietnamese Protestantism | 33 |
| The Early History of Vietnam..... | 33 |
| The Beginnings of Vietnamese Christianity..... | 36 |
| The Impact of Roman Catholicism in Vietnam | 38 |
| The Advent of Protestantism in Vietnam..... | 43 |
| The Arrival of Vietnamese Protestantism in the United States | 47 |
| Vietnamese Protestantism in the Greater Ohio Valley Region..... | 52 |
| Vietnamese Culture..... | 57 |
| Chapter 3 – The Vietnamese United Methodist Churches of Ohio | 73 |
| The Vietnamese United Methodist Church of Dayton | 73 |
| Prayer..... | 77 |
| Praise..... | 79 |
| Confessions of Sin | 82 |
| Confessions of Faith | 83 |
| Reading of Scripture | 84 |
| Preaching..... | 85 |
| The Lord’s Supper | 88 |
| Offertory Collections | 90 |
| Occasional Services | 90 |
| The Vietnamese United Methodist Church of Columbus..... | 92 |
| Prayer..... | 96 |
| Praise..... | 98 |
| Confessions of Sin | 100 |
| Confessions of Faith | 100 |
| Reading of Scripture | 101 |
| Preaching..... | 102 |
| The Lord’s Supper | 104 |
| Offertory Collections | 105 |
| Occasional Services | 105 |
| An Analysis of Vietnamese Methodist Worship | 106 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| The Length of Services in Vietnamese Methodist Churches..... | 114 |
| Prayer..... | 117 |
| Praise..... | 119 |
| Confessions of Sin..... | 122 |
| Confessions of Faith..... | 123 |
| Reading of Scripture..... | 125 |
| Preaching..... | 126 |
| The Lord's Supper..... | 129 |
| Offertory Collections..... | 130 |
| Occasional Services..... | 131 |
| Chapter 4 – The Vietnamese Baptist Churches of Kentucky and Tennessee | 134 |
| The Vietnamese Baptist Church of Louisville..... | 135 |
| Prayer..... | 138 |
| Praise..... | 139 |
| Confessions of Sin..... | 141 |
| Confessions of Faith..... | 142 |
| Reading of Scripture..... | 143 |
| Preaching..... | 144 |
| The Lord's Supper..... | 146 |
| Offertory Collections..... | 146 |
| Occasional Services..... | 147 |
| The Vietnamese Baptist Church of Bowling Green..... | 149 |
| Prayer..... | 151 |
| Praise..... | 151 |
| Confessions of Sin..... | 153 |
| Confessions of Faith..... | 153 |
| Reading of Scripture..... | 154 |
| Preaching..... | 156 |
| The Lord's Supper..... | 157 |
| Offertory Collections..... | 159 |
| Occasional Services..... | 159 |
| The Vietnamese Baptist Church of Memphis, Tennessee..... | 161 |
| Prayer..... | 167 |
| Praise..... | 168 |
| Confessions of Sin..... | 172 |
| Confessions of Faith..... | 173 |
| Reading of Scripture..... | 175 |
| Preaching..... | 176 |
| The Lord's Supper..... | 180 |
| Offertory Collections..... | 181 |
| Occasional Services..... | 183 |
| An Analysis of Vietnamese Baptist Worship..... | 185 |
| The Length of Services in Vietnamese Baptist Churches..... | 191 |
| Prayer..... | 192 |
| Praise..... | 193 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Confessions of Sin | 197 |
| Confessions of Faith | 198 |
| Reading of Scripture | 199 |
| Preaching | 200 |
| The Lord's Supper | 202 |
| Offertory Collections | 204 |
| Occasional Services | 206 |
| Chapter 5 – The Vietnamese Christian Fellowship of Knoxville, Tennessee | 211 |
| Prayer | 215 |
| Praise | 217 |
| Confessions of Sin | 219 |
| Confessions of Faith | 220 |
| Reading of Scripture | 222 |
| Preaching | 223 |
| The Lord's Supper | 225 |
| Offertory Collections | 227 |
| Occasional Services | 228 |
| Analysis of Vietnamese Christian Fellowship Worship Practices | 230 |
| The Length of Services at Vietnamese Christian Fellowship | 236 |
| Prayer | 236 |
| Praise | 238 |
| Confessions of Sin | 241 |
| Confessions of Faith | 242 |
| Reading of Scripture | 244 |
| Preaching | 245 |
| The Lord's Supper | 247 |
| Offertory Collections | 249 |
| Occasional Services | 251 |
| Chapter 6 – Vietnamese Worship and Models of Contextual Theology | 254 |
| Worship in the United Methodist churches | 259 |
| Worship in the Baptist churches | 261 |
| Worship in the Vietnamese Christian Fellowship | 263 |
| Chapter 7 – Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations | 267 |
| Contextualization in the United Methodist churches of Ohio | 272 |
| Contextualization in the Vietnamese Baptist churches of Kentucky | 273 |
| Contextualization in the Vietnamese Baptist Church of Memphis | 274 |
| Contextualization in the Vietnamese Christian Fellowship | 275 |
| Implications | 277 |
| Recommended Practices | 277 |
| Questionable Practices | 280 |
| Diaspora Missiology | 281 |
| Recommendations for Further Research | 283 |

List of Tables

| | |
|---|-----|
| Table 1. Immigrants/refugees arriving in the United States from Vietnam, Fiscal Years 1975 to 2001..... | 49 |
| Table 2. Estimated Vietnamese populations in states of the GOVR in 2008..... | 53 |
| Table 3. Average length of observed Vietnamese services for United Methodist Churches of Ohio (in minutes)..... | 114 |
| Table 4. Average length of sermons observed in the Vietnamese United Methodist Churches of Ohio (in minutes)..... | 115 |
| Table 5. Average length of <i>Ôn Kinh Thánh</i> observed in the Vietnamese United Methodist Church services of Ohio (in minutes)..... | 116 |
| Table 6. Average length of observed Vietnamese Baptist Church services in Kentucky (in minutes)..... | 191 |
| Table 7. Average length of sermons in Vietnamese Baptist Churches observed in the GOVR (in minutes)..... | 191 |

CHAPTER 1

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

The influx of Vietnamese immigrants into the United States has precipitated the founding of Vietnamese Protestant congregations in various regions of the country. This study addresses the way in which the worship practices of these congregations have been contextualized in order to enhance ministry of Vietnamese congregations either in the United States or overseas.

Background of the Study

In the summer of 2006, I was appointed to pastor a small United Methodist church in Bedford, Kentucky. Bedford is a small town in Trimble County, a bucolic locale which happens to be the county seat. It lies nearly an hour northeast of Louisville, Kentucky, and is only about ten miles from the banks of the Ohio River. Within a few weeks of my arrival, I discovered the existence of a Vietnamese Buddhist temple, *Chùa Chánh Pháp* (or the “Great Jewel Hall”) only a few miles from the town of Bedford.

As a teenager, I had been interested in the religions of the world and had studied Buddhism a little before my conversion to Christianity. When God directed me to start a postgraduate program in missions, I suspected that it was no accident that I had been assigned to a church so near to this temple. My resultant sense of missiological intrigue impelled me to visit the temple and introduce myself to the residents there.

Through a conversation with a church member who lived on the road which led to the temple, I obtained the telephone number of the property's owner - a Vietnamese businessman by the name of Xuan Do. I later spoke with the owner and he graciously offered to meet me on the temple site and introduce me to the monks who were staying there. It was then that I met three Vietnamese monks and began a series of dialogues with them which spanned many months. We spoke of the Buddha and of Christ. We spoke concerning the similarities in their teachings – and of the differences. In time, I developed a true appreciation of their discipline and the sincerity of their quest for understanding. In the following year or so, the monks left due to disagreements with the owner. (One of them did not travel far, however. He is currently building a temple in Carrollton, Kentucky - less than twenty miles from *Chùa Chánh Pháp*.) Now the temple is overseen by a nun with whom I also have enjoyed many enlightening discussions.

Eventually, it became known to me that a significant Vietnamese population existed in nearby Louisville (since many of those who came to *Chùa Chánh Pháp* lived in that city). Even later, I discovered the existence of a small Vietnamese Christian congregation in Louisville. By this time, I had already learned of the critical contextualization model that had been developed by Paul G. Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tienou. As part of a course in primal and folk religions, I had written a paper which addressed one of the significant practices of the Shoshone people of Wyoming, that is, the “Sun Dance” ritual. Considering those issues of contextualization caused me to wonder about what sort of

contextualization might be found in the worship practices of Vietnamese Christians – and whether an understanding of this contextualization could be helpful in communicating the gospel more appropriately to them.

Statement of the Problem

The problem is: We lack an adequately comprehensive understanding of the how the public worship practices of Vietnamese Protestant congregations in the greater Ohio Valley region (GOVR) reflect contextualization – specifically contextualization which is appropriate for Vietnamese people. How have the public worship practices of Vietnamese Protestant churches in the GOVR been contextualized? Discovering these contextualized practices will benefit Christian mission workers in two ways: (1) by enhancing ministry to the growing population of Christian and non-Christian Vietnamese in the U.S. and (2) by facilitating appropriately contextualized ministry to Vietnamese abroad. The final chapter of this study will provide specific recommendations with respect to the appropriate contextualization of worship for Vietnamese Protestant churches. This will allow us to make the best use of the missiological opportunities connected with the greater access of Christian witness to the Vietnamese in their homeland.

Research Claims and Questions

The study addresses the following categories of public worship: prayer, praise, and confession of sin, confession of faith (including Baptism), reading of scripture, preaching, the Lord's Supper (Holy Communion), offertory collection

and occasional services (that is, the application and adaptation of worship elements to specific situations - for instance, weddings). Contextualization of worship in each of these categories was researched with the exception of weddings and funerals (two types of occasional service). Private or family worship practices were not addressed.

This study addresses several important questions. The following questions gave focus to the research and direct the collection of data:

1. How has praise been contextualized in Vietnamese Protestant churches?
2. How has preaching been contextualized in Vietnamese Protestant churches?
3. How have performances of the sacraments (baptism and communion) been contextualized in Vietnamese Protestant churches?
4. How have other worship behaviors or symbols (including prayers, confessions of sin, confessions of faith, scripture readings, offertory collections, and some occasional services) been contextualized in Vietnamese Protestant churches?
5. How appropriate are these contextualizations with respect to the theological positions of the respective churches?

Although this research does not provide a comprehensive understanding of contextualization in Vietnamese churches located in all regions of the U.S., it is unique in that it looks at churches in a part of the U.S. where the organized Vietnamese Christian presence is likely to be newer. (See Appendix I for a list of these churches, including names, addresses and contact information.) An

assumption of the study is that churches in the GOVR are less likely to be affected by the approaches to contextualization found in other Asian churches (for instance, in southern California) since these churches are farther removed from their influence. This will reduce the likelihood that the contextualized practices were “borrowed” from non-Vietnamese (yet Asian) churches. This research offers descriptions, explanations, and evaluations of contextualized practices.

Significance of the Research

The immigration of Vietnamese people into the United States rose markedly with the fall of Saigon to communist forces in April of 1975. Since that time, it has experienced various peaks and valleys dependent on events both in Vietnam and elsewhere on the international scene. United States Census figures for the year 2000 indicate that well over 1.2 million residents of the U.S identified themselves as Vietnamese;¹ thus, they account for nearly eleven percent of Asians residing in the U.S. (Reeves and Bennett 1).

¹ The 2000 U. S. Census reports that 1,223,736 residents of the United States claimed Vietnamese ethnicity (Niedzwiecki, Duong: 5). In 2005, Duke Divinity School’s Pulpit and Pew Research Initiative produced a report by Timothy Tseng, *et al*, which provides statistics on the religious affiliation of Vietnamese in the U.S. According to the Tseng’s report, *Asian American Religious Leadership Today: A Preliminary Inquiry*, about a third of Vietnamese in the U.S. are Christian and about half are Buddhists. The same report indicates that 13.1 percent of Vietnamese in the U.S. are Protestant and 19.7 percent are Catholic. However, other sources disagree with those statistics. Similarly there is some confusion as to when conversions tend to take place. In his Ph.D. thesis, *Vietnamese Conversion to Christianity: the Impact of the Refugee Experience*, Peter Sam Cao Nguyen found that for many Vietnamese the refugee experience “created both a crisis and a context for a person’s conversion” (Nguyen: 98). Among those included in his qualitative study of conversion, all had been exposed to some extent to Christianity (either in a Catholic or Protestant form) while in Vietnam. Of those who were Protestants, about 75 percent converted after departing Vietnam. (About one third of these converted in the refugee camp and the remainder did so in the United States). Of those who became Catholics, only about half were converted after leaving Vietnam (Nguyen: 99). Nguyen recommends that further quantitative research be undertaken to identify more precisely when the conversions took place (Nguyen: 142).

Effects of globalization and the recent trend in Vietnam of increased openness to the West portend a growing opportunity for contact between Christians and Vietnamese both in the United States and Vietnam. With this in mind, it seemed prudent to investigate the ways in which the gospel might best be articulated in terms of contemporary Vietnamese language and culture. While some scholars have produced works which touch on areas such as Vietnamese contextual theology and strategies for mission to the Vietnamese people, very little information is readily available which addresses the way in which Vietnamese in the United States have contextualized the gospel in their worship practices. Thus, this research is likely to be helpful in informing the future practice of mission – both to Vietnamese in the U.S. and to those in Vietnam.

Literature Review

There was a considerable store of resources available from libraries, the internet, and various scholars to enhance my understanding of the Vietnamese people and their culture. They were quite helpful in learning about the history, language, and cultural influences from outside of Vietnam. However, many of the sources dealt with Roman Catholics rather than Protestants (the focus of this study). Also, the store of information available from the same sources on Vietnamese churches *inside the United States* was significantly less expansive. This review describes those resources which were most helpful to my research and details the most important ideas drawn from those resources.

History

For instance, *Southeast Asia, Past & Present*, by D. R. SarDeSai provided much useful understanding of the history of Vietnam and its surrounding regions. The author describes how the development of Vietnam's of religious practice was influenced from China. Rather than being impacted heavily by Hinduism and Theravada Buddhism imported from India (as were most of Vietnam's neighbors), Vietnamese traditional religion mixed with Mahayana Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism - the dominant religious forms of its neighbor to the north.

Colin Mason's *A Short History of Asia: Stone Age to 2000 AD* provided additional information concerning the history of Vietnam and its neighbors. It provides a proportionately larger discussion of the imperialist and colonial activities of the French which later colored the native perceptions of Christians in the eyes of many Vietnamese.

Samuel Hugh Moffett's two historical volumes, *The History of Christianity in Asia: Beginnings to 1500* and *The History of Christianity in Asia: 1500 to 1900*, offered an overview of Christian interaction with both Vietnam and other Asian countries – many of which influenced Vietnam either politically, socially, and culturally at times throughout its history. Moffett's discussions of significant events in Asian history (for instance, the "Rites" Controversy) shape this study's approach to issues of contextualization.

Stanley Karnow's book, *Vietnam, a History*, also provided an overview of Vietnamese history. However, its focus was on the events surrounding the

Vietnam War, including its political, socioeconomic and cultural impact on the Vietnamese people. This offered important information concerning the reasons for large-scale Vietnamese emigration following the war and some of the experiences which influenced the views of Vietnamese Christians who eventually immigrated to the U.S.

Peter C. Phan's book, *Mission and Catechesis: Alexandre de Rhodes and Inculturation in Seventeenth-Century Vietnam* held a wealth of information about Vietnamese culture and the way that de Rhodes responded to it. It describes both de Rhodes' mission strategies and his general approach of cultural accommodation. The discussion concerning de Rhodes' catechesis provides considerable insight into his process of inculturation.

A biographical work, *Vietnam: Mission on the Grand Plateaus*, by Pierre Dourisboure, and Christian Simonnet, related the story of missionaries evangelizing the mountainous regions of central Vietnam during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This book brought to light certain beliefs of the mountain people such as the Sedang "blood pact" and the idea that some birds of the region have the capacity for "prophetic singing."

They also describe certain peoples who live in Vietnam but are not "ethnically Vietnamese" (such as the Khmers Krom and the Chams); some of these people may have emigrated to the U.S. after the war. They have a much less sinicized culture and their Buddhist practices vary considerably from the forms of Buddhism which are prevalent in most of Vietnam.

Pham Xuan Tim's book, *The Gospel First Came to Vietnam*, describes how the earliest Protestant missionaries – those associated with the Christian and Missionary Alliance (or CMA) - introduced the gospel to the people of Vietnam. The group of churches which arose from this early Protestant activity no longer bears the CMA name but is now called the Evangelical Church in Viet Nam (ECVN). This book is important because many of the Christians in the Vietnamese Protestant churches in the U.S. have their spiritual roots the Evangelical Church in Vietnam. Orrel N. Steinkamp, in his book *The Holy Spirit in Vietnam* relates a number of events which took place in the twentieth century; these events had great impact on the church in Vietnam. Most of these events were related to the activities of the CMA/ECVN ministers and converts. Also, the collaborative work, *Vietnam: The Christian the Gospel, the Church*, by Carey B. Joynt, Richard D. Shewmaker, Charles C. West, *et al*, describes Vietnamese churches during the war in Vietnam.

In *Christianity and Buddhism: A Multi-Cultural History of Their Dialogue* by Whalen Lai and Michael von Bruck, the authors provide a history of the dialogue between Christianity and Buddhism in various parts of the world. Most significant to this study were discussions of that dialogue in Asia, of course, though the section on Buddhist-Christian dialogue in the United States also has relevance. The authors focus on historical comparisons of Jesus Christ to the Buddha, God to the *Dharma*, and the Church to the *Sangha*.

Religion

A number of books were helpful in providing a good understanding of Buddhism, the dominant religious influence on the people of Vietnam. These books include *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices* by Peter Harvey and *Buddhism in the Modern World: Adaptations of an Ancient Tradition* by Charles S. Prebish and Steven Heine. Additionally, *Mahāyāna Buddhist Meditation: Theory and Practice* by Minoru Kiyota and Elvin W. Jones provided more insight specifically into the Mahayana tradition which is by far the most common tradition practiced in Vietnam. Tissa Weerasingha's book, *The Cross and the Bo Tree: Communicating the Gospel to Buddhists*, was helpful in explaining the basics of various forms of Buddhism. It also offered some approaches to articulating the gospel in the Buddhist context.

Philip Taylor's *Goddess on the Rise: Pilgrimage and Popular Religion in Vietnam* looks at the recent surge in goddess worship in Vietnam. In the late-socialist political environment, the worship of local goddesses such as Bà Chúa Xú (the Lady of the Realm), Bà Đen (the Black Lady) and Đỉnh Cô (the Palace Damsel) has become increasingly popular. Related beliefs/practices impact contextualization decisions in ways that may be important to more recently immigrated Vietnamese people.

Unno Taitetsu's overview of Pure Land Buddhism, *River of Fire, River of Water: An Introduction to the Pure Land Tradition of Shin Buddhism*, was an important source because of the large role that Pure Land Buddhism plays in

Vietnamese culture. Its devotional nature may offer a basis for understanding the grace of Christ.

Joseph Goldstein's book, *One Dharma: the Emerging Western Buddhism*, deals with how Buddhism has evolved in the West. It addresses in some detail the changes in the forms of Chinese Buddhism which have been popular in Vietnam. To lesser extent, it discusses the impact of renowned Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh, a central figure in establishment of Vietnamese Buddhism in the West.

Similarly helpful information was supplied by Christopher S. Queen's book, *Engaged Buddhism in the West*. This book contains a section that highlights Thich Nhat Hanh's focus on an "engaged Buddhism" which directly addresses social concerns. Thich Nhat Hanh's teachings and practice are more deeply explored in his own works, *Essential Writings* and *Living Buddha, Living Christ*. He is arguably the most famous Vietnamese monk of the present day and is known and respected by nearly all Vietnamese. Thus understanding his teachings is important to the goal of relating to and connecting with the Vietnamese people.

Contextualization/Cross-cultural Communication

There were a few sources that proved quite valuable toward informing my understanding of contextualization and contextual theology. One excellent text, *Understanding Folk Religion: a Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices* by Paul G. Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tienou provides a process for appropriate contextualization which the authors refer to as "critical

contextualization.” Eugene A. Nida’s book, *Message and Mission: the Communication of the Christian Faith*, discusses the power of symbols and the theological basis of communication. It also discusses symbols and meaning – as well as the dynamics of communication (that is, what determines the impact of the communicated meaning).

A social scientist looks at immigrant churches in *Religion and the New Immigrants: Continuities and Adaptations in Immigrant Congregations* by Helen Rose Ebaugh and Janet Saltzman Chafetz. This book addresses the ways in which congregations adapt their worship styles in new contexts.

Thanh Trung Le’s doctoral dissertation, *A Case Study of Discipling Vietnamese Immigrants of the Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada*, provided helpful information on the emigration of both Christians and non-Christians from Vietnam and the related work of various Christian organizations. But its focus was on the development of appropriate materials for discipling Vietnamese Christians. It dealt with issues of contextualization in preparing study materials - or adapting previously prepared materials – for use in the Vietnamese church context. Thanh’s study also considers how Vietnamese cultural factors should affect the implementation of such discipling materials.

Minh Ngoc Dang’s *Communicating Christ to the Vietnamese: A Handbook to Equip the Vietnamese Christian for Personal Evangelism* and John Nguyen’s *Preparing a Program to Train Vietnamese Laymen to Serve as Bi-vocational Church Leaders in Local Churches and Missions* offer helpful insights

for the study. Both books provide useful information on how to articulate the gospel effectively in the Vietnamese context.

Interpretative Anthropology

Victor Turner's classic work on semiotic anthropology (also called "symbolic" or "interpretative" anthropology), *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure*, discusses among other things, the importance of *communitas* in ritual behavior. His earlier work, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, discusses symbolism in ritual. Turner's work was helpful in illuminating the significance of what he calls *action-field context* as a consideration in determining the meaning of behaviors. The action-field context denotes the circumstances which call for a particular ritual to be performed. According to Turner, the meanings associated with a ritual's symbols can only be determined by considering the widest possible action-field context in which the ritual occurs. Both books relate to discussions concerning sacraments/ordinances of the Vietnamese Protestant churches in our study.

Viet Culture and Experiences

Perhaps the most helpful book with respect to illuminating the breadth and depth of Vietnamese culture was *Culture and Customs of Vietnam*, by Mark W. McLeod and Nguyen Thi Dieu. The authors provide information on Vietnamese history, geography, language, and religion - even architecture, literature and the arts. The section on Vietnamese literature includes a discussion of some legends which may be useful "bridges" for contextualization of the gospel. Peter Sam

Cao Nguyen's doctoral dissertation, *Vietnamese Conversion to Christianity: the Impact of the Refugee Experience*, examined the relationship between the escape experiences of Vietnamese Protestants and Catholics and their experiences of conversion to Christianity. In studying this relationship, certain contextual factors which influence the worship practices of these Christians came to light. These contextual factors also inform this research.

Contextual Theology

Stephen B. Bevans' *Models of Contextual Theology* discusses various theological matrices from which contextual theologies arise. Robert Schreiter's *Constructing Local Theologies* articulates important principles and considerations which guide the contextualization process. It also provides us with our working definition of *syncretism*.

Nguyen Y. Doan's book, *People's Theology in Vietnam (Collected Meditations)*, also offered useful insights into the contextual theologizing of Vietnamese Christians. This Roman Catholic author focuses more on Christians in Vietnam during the period since the fall of Saigon to the communists in 1975. It mostly addresses contextualization of the sacraments and holidays like Easter. It also includes critiques of the western theological articulations which still exist in many Vietnamese churches. However, this book's importance to this project is mitigated by its focus on reconciling Christianity to Vietnamese socialism – an issue of less importance to Vietnamese Christians in the U.S.

Philip Khanh Van Trinh's doctoral dissertation, *Toward a Doctrine of Sin in the Vietnamese Context: Elements in the Dialogue between the Vietnamese*

Indigenous Perceptions and Christian Teaching on Sin by Missionaries, looked at important elements in the dialogue between Vietnamese culture and historical Christian hamartology. It analyzed historical attempts to reconcile them and recommended areas for “fruitful” future dialogue. His discussion of how J. D. Olsen translated the Greek and Hebrew terms for “sin” into Vietnamese is useful in discerning how well such terms fit in Vietnamese culture. Trinh also addresses the use of Vietnamese proverbs in contextualization and concepts of sin as articulated in the *Thánh Ca*.

Another book by Peter C. Phan, *In Our Own Tongues: Perspectives from Asia on Mission and Inculturation*, addresses more recent developments in Vietnamese contextual theology. Phan describes the state of affairs in the Catholic Church with respect the conduct of mission, contextual theology, and the official attitudes of the church with respect to the contextualized worship of Asian churches. With the exception of topics such as Marian Piety and papal authority (which are not relevant to Protestant churches), much of Phan’s discussion is helpful in evaluating the contextualized worship of churches included in this study. Another book by Phan, *Christianity with an Asian Face: Asian-American Theology in the Making* provides the first steps toward what he describes as an Asian-American “intermulticultural” theology where the interaction is *among* (rather than *between*) cultures.

Methodology

This qualitative study used a flexible research design which allows for the design to develop as the research proceeds. Due to the limited number of

Vietnamese churches in the greater Ohio Valley Region (GOVR), the selection of the churches for this study was based on the availability of churches and the willingness of pastors and congregations to participate in the research.

Data was collected using the following methods: interviews (recorded and stored as audio files), direct observation (recorded and stored as video files), and investigation of relevant books, articles and other literature. The data collection process required travel to churches in order to observe the church services and interview various individuals associated with each church. The case studies were performed on six Vietnamese Christian churches in the greater Ohio Valley region. The greater Ohio Valley region includes Kentucky, Tennessee, Ohio, and Indiana. (See Appendix I for a list of the churches studied). Initially, some churches were identified early through internet searches and through conversations with denominational leaders in the region. Subsequently, other churches were found through conversations with the Vietnamese pastors of the previously identified churches.

These churches are of various Protestant denominations (Baptist, United Methodist, and Evangelical Free Church of America). The case studies specifically investigate the worship practices associated with each congregation (particularly regarding the style of music, language and content of proclamation, use of the Scriptures, performance of sacraments, *et al*) and examine them for evidence of contextualization.

The study used “semistructured” interviews for the initial interviews. This means that those interviews were conducted using prepared interview schedules

which addressed predetermined areas of inquiry yet the interview process was also flexible enough to allow the interviewer to explore unexpected lines of inquiry which arose during the interviews. If confusion arose when comparing the information from a given interview with that of another interview (or an observed phenomenon), follow-up interviews were used to clarify any nebulous issues. Appropriate permissions were obtained from interviewees and all interviews were recorded and stored as audio files.

Interviews were conducted with four groups of people: (1) pastors and other church leaders, (2) laity connected with the individual churches, (3) denominational leaders having knowledge of Vietnamese worship practices, and (4) scholars in the field. “Pastors” in this case refers to pastors of the Vietnamese churches and “and other church leaders” to those who are considered leaders in those churches (officially or unofficially). Leaders and laity which were interviewed were selected based on the length of their participation in the congregation, the degree to which they are articulate in English, and the counsel of the pastor. Some denominations have ministries to the Vietnamese population in the U.S. Thus some denominational leaders were found to be excellent sources of information on Vietnamese worship. Scholars in missiology and related fields also offered useful insights.

Worship practices are behaviors and behaviors are best studied by direct observation. Thus the worship services were observed in order to discern what elements have been contextualized for the Vietnamese. Appropriate permissions were obtained and video recordings were made of the actual worship services as

well. This allowed me to review the services at a later time in order to collect any examples of contextualization which I might have missed during my direct observation. When there were questions about what actually happened or what meaning should be attached to some behavior, the video recordings were also useful for review and discussion with clergy or others during subsequent interviews.

In the course of my research, certain resources came to light which were relevant to the study. Conversations/interviews with Vietnamese pastors and scholars or others revealed the existence of other literature (such as church bulletins and periodicals) containing information that enhanced the study. These resources were investigated for the purpose of uncovering more information that was useful to this research project.

The following steps were followed in the process of researching the worship practices of the selected congregations:

1. I conducted and recorded semistructured interviews (two or more for each congregation) using prepared interview schedules which inquired into the worship practices of the respondents' congregations and their meaning (thus addressing phenomenological and ontological concerns).
2. I directly observed and recorded at least two worship services for each congregation, noting the various worship practices which they used.
3. I reassessed the clarity of my understanding of the answers to the interview questions based on the observation of the worship practices.
4. I conducted follow-up discussions with respondents to clarify any areas of

confusion.

5. I reviewed any relevant literature that came to light during the research process for information which was useful to the goal of this research.

The validity of the study was enhanced by certain aspects of the data collection method. For instance, the study used multiple methods of data collection (data triangulation) and follow-up interviews were used to check for clarity of understanding (member checking). The production of audio recordings of the interviews and video recordings of the worship services also addressed reliability and validity concerns.

Pilot visits were made to one church in which two worship services were observed and an interview conducted.² The February service was just over two hours and included a celebration of the Lord's Supper.³ The flow of the service was as follows:

1. a pastoral greeting/welcome,
2. an opening prayer led by a congregant,
3. led by the pastor, the congregation sings from the *Thánh Ca* – “Love Was When” followed by “I Know Who Holds Tomorrow,”
4. pastor leads a responsive reading – *Thánh Ca* #30,
5. pastor's sermon “The True Vine and the Branches” – *Kinh Thánh*: John 15,

² The Vietnamese Baptist Church in Bowling Green, Kentucky was visited on February 22, 2009 and again on March 15, 2009. Both services commenced at approximately 3:00 pm Central Standard Time (CST). The services were recorded and stored as video files.

³ According to the pastor, the Lord's Supper is typically celebrated once per month. It is usually held on the first Sunday of the month. Because the pastor had been away in Vietnam in early February, it was celebrated the Sunday after he returned.

6. the pastor leads a celebration of Lord's Supper,
7. a closing prayer was led by a congregant,
8. a closing chorus – *Đổi Mới Chúng Con Hoài* (“Revive Us Again,”) and
9. the service was dismissed, followed by an informal time of fellowship.

In all, there were seven congregants present - including myself. Both Vietnamese and English languages were used during nearly every element of the service. (First, Vietnamese would be spoken, then the English translation). The exceptions to this were the congregants' prayers which were in English only. The pastoral prayers were offered in Vietnamese first, then in English. All scripture readings were from a Vietnamese translation (specifically, the *Kinh Thánh Cựu Ước và Tân Ước*). All hymns and songs were taken from the Vietnamese *Thánh Ca* hymnal - specifically, *Thánh Ca tôn vinh Đức Chúa Trời*. (Many of these hymns have verses in both Vietnamese and English).

The March service was about an hour and a half in length and did not include a celebration of the Lord's Supper. It differed from the February in other ways as well. The songs sung included *Tuy Tôi Có Cả Thiên Hạ*, *Nguyện Càng Yêu-Thương Christ*, *Theo Chua*, and *Đổi Mới Chúng Con Hoài*. The responsive reading was *Thánh Ca* #33 and the pastor's sermon was “Fishers of Men” based on Mark 1: 17 from the *Kinh Thánh*. At this service, there were eight congregants present - including myself (three men and five women). Again, Vietnamese and English languages were used during nearly every element of the service. (First, Vietnamese would be spoken, then the English translation). The exceptions to this were the congregants' prayers which were in English only. The pastoral

prayers were offered in Vietnamese first, then in English.

An interview was conducted with one of the members prior to the church service in March.⁴ The subject's father had founded the congregation after attending the Baptist church in that city for awhile. He indicated that his father also sometimes leads the congregational singing and may even offer special music for some services. He said that the presence of English-speakers does affect what languages are used in the service. (If no Anglophones are present, the service is conducted entirely in Vietnamese – but usually there are English-speakers in attendance.) Some songs are written by Vietnamese people; others were adapted from hymns written in western languages. He identified a few favorite songs and themes that were related to them.

He indicated that English was sometimes more comfortable for him than Vietnamese – for instance, he speaks and understands spoken Vietnamese well but sometimes has difficulty reading it. He was not able to identify any recurring themes or ideas in the preaching heard by the congregation but he did indicate that the preaching tends to focus on family issues more than the preaching he has heard in other American churches. He said that the Catholic churches that he attended in California tend to reflect Vietnamese culture more clearly than his current church does.

He was unsure about the meaning of the word “sacrament” used in the interview questions but it was easily explained to him because of his high level of

⁴ The interviewee was a second-generation Vietnamese American enrolled in a business degree program at Western Kentucky University. He had no difficulty being interviewed in English but seemed to have difficulty with some of the questions. He said that they addressed questions that he had never really previously considered.

English language skill. However, other cases may arise which will require the use of an interpreter. His understanding of the sacraments seemed about what one would expect for most Baptist churches.⁵ With respect to miscellaneous worship symbols, he indicated that his congregation tends to avoid the use of worship symbols, in general. He also indicated that the frequent sharing of meals after a service might be a reflection of Vietnamese culture because of their general emphasis on community.

From these pilot visits, I concluded the following: (1) It might be useful to have an interpreter present for interviews with persons who are less skilled in the English language. (2) Many Vietnamese Americans commonly switch back and forth between languages in order to communicate certain types of ideas (a phenomenon known as “code-switching”). I developed a list of specialized words - including their translation into Vietnamese – for use in all interviews. These translated words can be used to explain certain words that may be difficult for the interviewees. (3) As I examined the data from these visits, I determined that certain questions needed to be added to gather additional information, and (4), that some questions needed to be simplified or clarified.

Theoretical Framework

Theories based on the following scholarly works in various fields of study were used to interpret the data collected for this research:

1. *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices* by Paul G. Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tienou

⁵ That is, it reflected a memorialist approach to Holy Communion, “believer’s baptism,” etc.

2. *Message and Mission: The Communication of the Christian Faith* by Eugene A. Nida
3. *Models of Contextual Theology* by Stephen B. Bevans
4. *Constructing Local Theologies* by Robert J. Schreiter
5. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* by Victor Witter Turner, and
6. *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* also by Victor W. Turner

Specifically, those theories include (1) the critical contextualization model of Hiebert, *et al*, (2) Victor Turner's semiotic approach to anthropology, (3) principles of communication structure and dynamics, and (4) Robert Schreiter's view of syncretism.

Critical Contextualization

Elements of each congregation's various worship practices were evaluated based on Paul Hiebert's model of critical contextualization in order to determine whether the practices illustrate appropriate contextualization of the gospel with respect the cultural perspectives of Vietnamese Christians residing in the United States. The critical contextualization model focuses on four activities or stages:

1. investigation of the phenomena associated with religious practice
2. ontological reflection on the meaning associated with those phenomena identified in the first stage
3. evaluation of the responses
4. development of appropriately transformative ministry activity

Though the study does not assume that “appropriate contextualization” (see definition on page 26) requires that the worship practices reflect their use of Hiebert’s model, the development of the research questions and the general structure of the interviews were guided by the considerations of the critical contextualization model. Thus, they address phenomenology of the worship practices (as in stage 1 above) and their meaning (as in stage 2). The collection of this data naturally facilitated the evaluation of the theological appropriateness of these behaviors (stage 3) and of how contextual aspects of these behaviors enhance their transformative power (stage 4). The study’s reflections focus on evaluating the existing symbols, behaviors, etc. and the understanding that congregational members have concerning them. Reflecting on these points helped to determine whether the practices demonstrated a lack of sufficient contextualization (falling short of our definition of appropriate contextualization), appropriate contextualization (meeting its definition), or overcontextualization (meeting our definition of syncretism).

Communication

Eugene A. Nida’s book, *Message and Mission: the Communication of the Christian Faith*, addresses the power of symbols and the theological basis of communication. It also discusses symbols and meaning – as well as the dynamics of communication. Nida asserts that “communication must also be viewed as a force, for information is power” (Nida 125). Communication dynamics is about what factors effect the forcefulness of a communicated message. He suggests a theological understanding of communication based the Incarnation of Christ, the

divine nature of revealed truth, and the limitations of human perception. He explains the structure of communication in terms of three elements: *source*, *message*, and *receptor*. His discussion of language as a code system informed issues relating to translation and his explanations of the dynamics of communication were helpful in determining the extent to which a communicated meaning (in proclamation, music, ritual, etc.) impacts the one who receives it.

Contextual Theology

Bevans' book, *Models of Contextual Theology*, provides helpful models for contextual theology and other information useful to the analysis of these worship practices. One consideration in determining the appropriateness of a contextualized worship practice is whether the practice is logically consistent with a group's overall theology. Identifying the model or models which may be represented in the worship practices of these churches was an important step in this process.

Robert J. Schreiter's *Constructing Local Theologies* contains helpful principles used to construct contextual theologies for particular people groups (in this case, Vietnamese people in the U.S.). His model for understanding syncretism is a semiotic model from the perspective of the "receiving" culture (that is, the culture receiving the gospel). Schreiter defines syncretism and identifies four ways of incorporating Christianity into a culture that are likely to lead to syncretism (Schreiter 146-148):

1. inappropriate use of the similarities between the sign systems of the receiving culture and those of Christianity,

2. filling the gaps with signs and codes from Christianity where those of the receiving culture are deemed as weak,
3. indiscriminate mixing of the sign systems of Christianity with those of the receiving culture,
4. forcing the culture to accept and use a foreign sign system by dominating the receiving culture.

In each case, elements of the gospel may be accepted by the receiving culture but the meanings of the signs may be changed to conform to its (non-Christian) worldview. Such definitions and models are important since part of the study's intent is to discern instances of syncretism.

Symbology

Additional theoretical underpinning for the evaluation of contextualized worship practices (particularly, the sacraments) also relied upon the work of Victor Turner in the field of semiotic anthropology. The semiotic approach focuses on analyzing the meaning of symbols in order to understand culture. Turner's work deals with the use of symbols, dramas, metaphors, and rituals. All of these are issues which come into play in the worship practices of these congregations. The context in which symbols communicate meaning was a particular emphasis in Victor Turner's work. He suggested that symbols (particularly rituals) could produce social transformations in people. His interpretation of ritual symbols was based on three types of information gathered by the researcher:

1. The external form and characteristics of the symbols

2. Interpretations provided by both laymen and specialists within the society
3. The researcher's deductions based on the symbol's context

Turner's approach was useful in analyzing symbols to determine the worldview that the symbols communicate.⁶ It also helped in assessing the compatibility of symbols/rituals with Christian practice. This approach fit well with the use of direct observation and interviews. It also meshed with the critical contextualization process – especially in its phenomenological investigation and ontological reflection phases.

The Collaborative Use of Theories

The theories worked together in various ways to answer the research questions. First, the phenomenological stage of Hiebert's critical contextualization model provided the theoretical basis for collecting the data required to answer research questions 1 through 4. Victor Turner's work was also helpful with respect to these questions since his approach suggests that our phenomenological investigation pay attention to the external form and characteristics of the symbols. The ontological reflection and evaluation stages of Hiebert's model underpin the assessment of contextualization required to answer research question 5. Turner's work was helpful again in guiding us to consider (1) interpretations provided by both laymen and specialists within the society and (2) the context in which the symbol occurs. The assessment required to answer

⁶ This study addresses both the forms and meanings involved with these worship practices. It would be difficult to make the argument that *any* contextualization has occurred at all unless it was first demonstrated that the practices of Vietnamese Protestant churches differ in significant ways from other American churches of their denomination. Thus, information was gathered on Vietnamese Protestant churches and compared to that of their non-Vietnamese counterparts. This is not an attempt to suggest that practices of non-Vietnamese American churches should be viewed as "normative."

question 5 would not have been possible without the definition of syncretism (provided by Schreiter and used with some modification).⁷ Eugene Nida's insights on the impact of communication partly provided the basis for answering research question 5 as well – since his explanations of the dynamics of communication were helpful in determining the extent to which a communicated meaning (in proclamation, music, ritual, etc.) impacts the one who receives it. Nida's insights on the structure of communication also bear on research question 5. For each congregation, our assessments considered the specific *source* (Vietnamese or non-Vietnamese pastor), *message* (Arminian, Calvinist, etc.), and *receptor* (first- or second-generation Vietnamese, or non-Vietnamese). Finally, Bevans' models of contextual theology were necessary in answering question 5 since we have defined the "appropriateness" of contextual elements in terms of consistency with at least one model of contextual theology.

Ethical Considerations in the Research Design

The research was conducted with honesty and consideration for the dignity of the participants. All participants were informed of the nature of the research and made aware of audio and video recordings. The pastor (or similar authority) in each church was informed and provided consent prior to participation in the study and the recording of each worship service. Similarly, all interviewees were informed and provided consent prior to conducting the interviews. Specifically, interviewees provided consent to (1) participation in the study; (2) recording of the interview; and (3) referencing/quoting/summarizing of the interview in the

⁷ Recall that research question 5 was "How appropriate are these contextualizations with respect to the theological positions of the respective churches?"

published study. Interviewees were also notified that interviews could be stopped at any time at their request. Aside from scholars, pastors and denominational officials, individual interviewees were identified in the study using pseudonyms.

Definitions of Key Terms

Contextualization is “the integration of culture with Christ and his basic message (salvation and the coming of his kingdom)” for the enrichment of the whole body of Christ (Luzbetak 72). Specifically, this refers to ways in which considerations of the Vietnamese context have affected decisions concerning the design of worship – whether those decisions were made by Vietnamese churches in Vietnam or in the US. Other aspects of contextualization (Bible translation, evangelism, Christian education, church planting, etc) will be addressed primarily with respect to their impact on worship.

Appropriate contextualization means contextualization (as defined above) which is free of syncretism. It also means that the contextualization is - as much as possible - inoffensive to the people of Vietnamese culture.⁸ As much as possible, the worship expressions should be consistent with at least one model of contextual theology.⁹

Critical contextualization is contextualization conducted according to the stages outlined by Paul G. Hiebert, in his article, "Critical Contextualization." (Hiebert, 1987: 5-23). This involves investigation into the phenomenology of

⁸ It must be recognized, however, that a truly transformative gospel will sometimes unavoidably cause offense.

⁹ However, it must also be understood that every religious system has its “mysteries” and apparent contradictions.

religious activity (for example, worship), the discovery meanings associated with the phenomena (Hiebert 22), an evaluation of beliefs and practices in the light of biblical truth, and transformation of believers and churches from the conduct of unbiblical practices to authentic Christian witness in their contexts (Hiebert 383).

Occasional services are worship services designed for a particular occasion in the life of a congregation (for instance, confirmation, baptism, ordination, etc.). However, in this study, funerals and weddings will be excluded from the definition since they are not primarily intended for the entire congregation's participation in worship.

The *greater Ohio Valley region* (GOVR) shall be considered to include the area within the boundaries of these states: Kentucky, Tennessee, Ohio, and Indiana.

Syncretism, according to one definition offered by Robert J. Schreiter, is “the mixing of elements of two religious systems to the point where at least one, if not both of the systems, loses its basic structure and identity” (Schreiter 144).¹⁰ For purposes of this study, we will consider syncretism to be “the mixing of elements of two religious systems to the point where *Christianity* loses its basic structure and identity.”

Vietnamese church refers to any congregation in the Ohio Valley region of the United States which has mostly Vietnamese members (or was formed as an outreach to ethnically Vietnamese people in the United States), unless otherwise specified.

¹⁰ This is only one of Schreiter's definitions – but it is the one we shall use for purposes of this study (in a modified form.)

Vietnamese pastor refers to the pastor of a Vietnamese church. It includes pastors who are not ethnically Vietnamese themselves but serve Vietnamese congregations.

Worship refers to “worthiness, dignity, or merit, the recognition accorded or due to these, the paying of homage or respect” (Bromiley 969). This study will focus on expressions of the various elements of public worship as opposed to private or family worship. Specifically, those elements include prayer, praise, confession of sin, confession of faith (including baptism), scripture reading, preaching, the Lord’s Supper (Holy Communion), the collection, and occasional services (Bromiley 970).

Chapters Overview

This first chapter gives an overview of the dissertation, including a general introduction, statement of the problem, research claims/questions and their significance, a review of relevant literature, methodology, theoretical framework, ethical considerations, and definitions of terms. Chapter 2 provides a brief history of Viet Christianity from the first century to its arrival in the US as well as information on Vietnamese culture.

The next four chapters discuss the findings for each church participating in the study. For instance, Chapter 3 addresses the findings for the United Methodist churches in Ohio and provides an analysis of those findings. Chapter 4 provides similar information for the Vietnamese Baptist churches in Kentucky and Tennessee. Chapter 5 provides the findings for the Vietnamese Christian Fellowship in Knoxville, Tennessee and an analysis of those findings. Chapter 6

explores the compatibility of the Vietnamese worship practices of these churches with the six models of contextual theology as articulated by Stephen B. Bevans: the translation, praxis, anthropological, synthetic, transcendental and countercultural models (Bevans 141-143). Finally, Chapter 7 summarizes the conclusions of the study, discusses their implications, and provides some recommendations for further research.

Chapter Summary

After introducing this chapter, I have described the events which precipitated this research and the rationale for the study. Additionally, I presented the problem that I have addressed – including any assumptions important to understanding the basis of this study and relevant questions which might confirm/refute these assumptions. The significance of the study and its importance to the field of missiology were also explained. I have identified key features of the research design as well as actions taken to limit the scope of the research and to enhance its validity and reliability. The study's theoretical framework was discussed along with the limitations of its generalizability. This chapter also contains an analysis of the ethical problems associated with the research and actions taken with respect to those problems. Finally, the chapter concludes with an overview of the chapters included in the study and a summary of this chapter.

CHAPTER 2

THE HISTORY & CULTURE OF VIETNAMESE PROTESTANTISM

The history of Vietnamese Christianity from earliest times until its arrival in the United States sheds light on the current situation which Vietnamese Christians face in their new country. This story is a narrative which illumines the intertwining of divine strands of grace with webs of human frailty and ignorance. The resultant tapestry is revealed in the lives of missionaries and martyrs, kings and colonizers – but most importantly, in the response of hungry hearts to a life-transforming gospel. The story may have begun at a time when the Christian movement itself was young.

The Early History of Vietnam

By about 300 BCE, various peoples in Southeast Asia had already developed fairly distinct indigenous cultures. Yet within a century or so, both India and China began to influence these groups. The Chinese projected power southward into the region now known as Vietnam in 207 BCE. During the Early Han dynasty (111 BCE to 203 CE) the region was made a province of China and renamed *Gaio-chi*. Almost immediately, Chinese culture began to heavily influence many aspects of Vietnamese life. China also brought social and political change to Vietnam which included the establishment of a *mandarin* hierarchy. These changes were largely a result of the influx of three newly-imported religious systems: Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism.

The earliest traditional religion of the Vietnamese people was known as the Cult of Heaven and Spirits. This system involved the belief in various spiritual beings (genies, spirits, immortals, and deities) which inhabited the known world. When Buddhism arrived in Vietnam (primarily from China), it was the *Mahayana* tradition which was best received. Specifically, the “Pure Land” sect which had developed in China became most popular. This sect combines aspects of Chinese *Mahayana* Buddhism with devotion to Amidha and the female bodhisattva Quan Yin (in Vietnamese, Quan Âm) in hopes of attaining rebirth in the “Pure Land.”¹¹ Buddhist beliefs were eventually co-mingled with Vietnamese traditional religion, Taoism and Confucianism, producing the unique form of Buddhism practiced in Vietnam.

Confucianism was also imported from China during this period. Eventually it became the official state cult. The doctrines of Confucius mostly address the ethics of personal and interpersonal conduct in addition to social and political philosophy. One very important area of concern was the proper conduct of family obligations. Reverend Phạm Xuân Tín describes the impact of Confucianism on Vietnamese culture as follows:

Through many centuries this religion takes the prominent place in Vietnamese society, especially among the intellectual class. Confucianism supports the patriarchal family and its teachings focus on morality in terms of duties, obligations of a child to parent, wife to husband, younger brother to elder brother and children to the father . . .

The rites prescribe also the veneration of ancestors before the family ancestral altar. The virtues necessary for the foundation of the national and family life are filial devotion, loyalty, benevolence, justice, propriety and respect for learning (Pham 1969: 20).

¹¹ This is a type of “Western Paradise” from which it is easy to attain enlightenment.

Confucianism was quite influential in Vietnam during (and well after) the period of China's dominance. When Vietnam shook itself free of Chinese power in the 11th century, Buddhism came to higher prominence in state matters since Confucianism was more strongly associated with Chinese rule. But Confucian principles continued to be very influential in Vietnamese culture.

The other religion imported by foreigners in this period was Taoism. It has two distinct forms, philosophical and religious.¹² Taoism added a host of deities to Vietnam's already crowded pantheon. The mixture of the two groups of beings resulted in the presence of various spiritual intermediaries between the humans and the gods. These intermediaries are a prominent distinctive of Vietnamese Taoism.

By the third century CE, the Funan Empire had arisen in what is now the southern part of Vietnam. Funan's forces projected power from South Vietnam across Cambodia and Thailand – even as far as the Malay Peninsula. Then it was Cambodia's turn to become dominant. The Khmers (forerunners of the modern Cambodians) defeated Funan in the seventh century, laying the substrate on which the nascent Angkor Empire was built in the ninth century. However, even the mighty Angkor kings were unable to completely suppress Vietnamese power until the thirteenth century. The Mons and the Burmese gained supremacy to the west. Meanwhile the great maritime empires (Srivijaya in Sumatra and the Saliendras in Java) were rising to power to the south.

¹² Philosophical Taoism is rational and contemplative; conversely, the religious form of Taoism involves magical beliefs and practices. For instance, philosophical Taoism accepts death as a natural event which every living person must experience. On the other hand, practitioners of religious Taoism attempt to resist death "by means of alchemy" (Phan 1996: 16).

The Mongols eventually came to power in China exerting significant influence over the entire region, however, each nation was affected in distinct ways and in varying degrees. But the Mongol onslaught was stopped at Dai Viet (an ancient name for Vietnam), Champa, and Myanmar. By the eighteenth century, the three most powerful kingdoms in Southeast Asia were Burma, Siam and Vietnam. By the close of that century, these countries had become independent and unified nations.

The Beginnings of Vietnamese Christianity

Scholars disagree concerning the earliest Christian influence in Vietnam; but some believe that Christianity arrived in first century. Phuoc Nguyen, for instance, cites the 16th century Spanish priest Pedro Ordonez de Cavallos' assertion that the Apostle Thomas presented the gospel to a Vietnamese king in the first century (Nguyen 1996: 1). According to this story, the king was converted. Yet there has been little evidence to support this claim. China dominated Vietnam for about ten centuries from 111 BCE to 939 CE. For most of the first century, the Chinese ruled *Gaio-chi* (presently part of northern Vietnam). In those years when the Chinese did not rule (40-43 CE), *Gaio-chi* was controlled by the two Trung sisters rather than by a single king. When Chinese forces were able to overthrow them and regain power, the two sisters committed suicide by jumping into a river in order to avoid being taken as prisoners (Nguyen 1996: 1). No evidence has been found to indicate that either of these sisters converted to Christianity.

However, during the 16th century, archaeological evidence was discovered which dates certain Christian monuments to the period when Si Nghiep was governor over Vietnam (186-226 CE). These archaeological remains indicate that Nghiep built churches and erected monuments depicting Jesus on the cross. Phuoc Nguyen also cites Vietnamese priest Nguyen-Hong's assertion that "a group of European businessmen visited Vietnam in the second century" (Nguyen 1996: 2). These traveling businessmen may have been the first missionaries to Vietnam. There are a few other possibilities as well. Chinese historical documents record the arrival of a diplomat sent by Marco Aurelio Antonio who visited *Giao-chi* in 166 CE. Also, Nestorian missionaries may have traveled through northern Vietnam in route to China around 980 CE (Nguyen 1996: 2).

During the Lý and Trần dynasties (1054-1802 CE) Vietnamese Buddhism grew in its influence and eventually many high government posts were held by Buddhists. This was the political heyday of Vietnamese Buddhism. The Buddhist scholar Thich Thien-An said that "By the time of the Trần dynasty, Vietnamese Buddhism and Vietnamese nationalism were one and the same, not two" (Trinh 10, 11). The threat of invasion from the north remained during this period. But the burgeoning Vietnamese population was pushing the limits of what available farm land could yield. This resulted in a massive migration southward which pushed against the boundaries of Champa. This "southward march" was, ironically, facilitated by calling on the same Chinese military forces which the Vietnamese had fought against for their independence in the north (Trinh 11).

Regardless of when the gospel first arrived, it would have been in a religious context which included not only the prehistoric Viet religious traditions but also the three religions imported from China. Because of the millennium-long domination of the Chinese, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism would have already been increasingly mixing with and, in some cases, overshadowing traditional Viet beliefs. A much smaller factor would have been the religious impact of the Champas, a people who were more influenced by India than China.¹³ At any rate, if the gospel did reach Vietnam in this period, the few early remnants of Christianity's existence in Vietnam prior to the 16th century suggest that it had not spread very widely until the arrival of Roman Catholic missionaries the middle of the second millennium.

The Impact of Roman Catholicism in Vietnam

The first Catholic missionaries arrived in Vietnam in the sixteenth century. Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism had entered the region with a series of conquering armies but the first Catholic missionaries came in peace at a time when the people had thrown off Chinese hegemony. A Roman Catholic missionary known as Father Ignatius arrived in 1533, followed by a Franciscan missionary named Bartolomeo Ruiz in 1585. However, Ruiz only stayed a short time before going to the Philippines. But soon after, the Spanish priest Ordonez de Cavallos arrived and was successful in bringing the Roman Catholic faith to Mai Hoa, a mistress of King Lê Thế Tông (Nguyen 2003: 30, 31).

¹³ Thus the Buddhism of the Cham Empire was shaped more by the Theravada sect – as opposed to the Mahayana sect which was dominant in China.

When Alexandre de Rhodes arrived in 1624 with his missionaries, the real foundations of Vietnamese Catholicism were laid. He was committed to addressing aspects of culture in his presentation of the gospel. For instance, he was convinced that success would be necessarily dependent upon mastery of the local languages/dialects.¹⁴ De Rhodes instructed his catechists/missionaries to adapt to and preserve indigenous practices whenever they were not opposed to Christian morality.¹⁵ His main tests in determining whether a particular practice must be discontinued were (1) whether Jesus commanded that they abandon it, and (2) whether it was opposed to gospel.¹⁶

De Rhodes himself wore a Vietnamese hat and robe. Allowing his hair to grow to shoulder length, he braided it like most Vietnamese men. He wore the heelless sandals of the common man - avoiding both European footwear and the embroidered shoes worn by mandarins or wealthy Vietnamese. In his preaching, he would often refer to Vietnamese proverbs in the course of reinforcing points that he was making from the Scriptures. He rejected what he saw as incompatible with Christianity but tried to preserve practices which were honorable, giving them Christian meaning. He encountered some practices that seemed liable to superstition but held possibilities for spiritual edification. In such cases, he

¹⁴ In seventeenth-century Vietnam, the two main languages in use were Vietnamese and Chinese. Due to its history of domination by China, the Chinese language was common. It was known as the language of scholars (Vietnamese: *chu nho*) and was the official language until the early twentieth century. Yet it was the hexatonal, monosyllabic Vietnamese language written in a unique demotic script (*chu nom*) which prevailed among the people for centuries. In his preaching and teaching, de Rhodes used the Vietnamese language, of course. In his writing, he followed the lead of his Jesuit predecessors, using a Romanized script for the Vietnamese language. But de Rhodes added the familiar diacritical marks to denote the six tones. This Romanized script with diacritical marks eventually became the national language by imperial decree in 1917, replacing both *chu nom* and *chu nho*.

¹⁵ For instance, he did not require the converts to abandon their native dress or hairstyles.

¹⁶ Some of his greatest difficulties involved his requirement to abandon polygamy before receiving baptism.

sought to either strip them of their objectionable aspects or to transform through Christian interpretation. He also tried to avoid importing western cultural baggage that might unnecessarily set converts apart from their compatriots.

In refuting Buddhism, de Rhodes' strategy was to attack its founder *argumentum ad hominem*, charging that the Buddha "had a violent and evil temper" and "gave himself up to magic and had two demons as friends" (Phan 1996: 84).¹⁷ However, the most potentially useful parts of his strategy are found in (1) his theological arguments *for* theism (specifically, monotheism) and the immortality of the soul, and (2) his arguments *against* the transmigration of souls. One of his most important contributions was the use of the expression *Đức Chúa Trời Đấng* ("Noble Lord of Heaven and Earth") for God rather than the previously employed term *Chúa Deu* or *Chúa Deus* (Phan 1996: 135).

De Rhodes' ministry successes (and those of his catechists) were frequently characterized by "power encounters." A certain chief once asked him to send Christians to his village to heal the many sick that were there. The Christians he dispatched

. . . visited the sick, saying a prayer and giving them a few drops of holy water to drink. In less than a week's time they cured 272 sick people. . . This heartened Christians greatly and many pagans were thereby convinced of their errors. (Phan 1996: 88)

De Rhodes recorded that they "drove away devils as a matter of course and cured all sorts of diseases" (Phan 1996: 88). Alexandre de Rhodes was dedicated to pursuing the conversion of the Vietnamese people using a strategy of cultural adaptation and theological/historical argument. But the message of his ministry

¹⁷ He also charged that the success of Buddhism in China was due to a historic betrayal of Emperor Ming by a trusted envoy during the Han dynasty.

was made more credible by “power encounter.” His strategies of cultural adaptation and “power encounter” and many of his theological arguments were quite successful.

While some emperors allowed Catholicism to grow unhampered, there were also periods of severe persecution – especially over the question of whether Vietnamese Catholics should be allowed to perform Confucian rites:

Persecutions began as early as the 17th century and became more violent with time. The bloodiest persecutions occurred under the rules of Minh-Mạng, Thiệu-Trị, and Tự Đức in the 19th century. Together with suspicion of Catholicism being the extended hand of imperialism, the “rites controversy” played a major part in these persecutions of Catholicism.

. . . When the Catholic Church, with Pope Benedict XIV’s bull *Ex Quo Singulari* (1742) condemned the rites and prohibited Catholics from taking part in the ancestral rites, Catholicism began to suffer the bloodiest persecutions (Nguyen 2003: 32, 33).

When France took control of Vietnam in 1867, the persecutions came to an end. In this new era of peace, Catholicism grew. Yet Catholics tended to be clustered together in their own communities, isolated from most non-Catholics (Nguyen 2003: 33). The French colonial government did not officially recognize Catholicism as the state religion of Vietnam. However, “most of the French officers, administrators, etc. . . were members of the Roman Catholic Church” and “they not only allowed but encouraged Catholic missionaries to extend their work” (Pham 1969: 21).

In response to colonial policies of taxation/regulation, resistance to the French authorities arose. This led to the Tay-Son rebellion and the subsequent establishment of the Tay-Son Dynasty in 1788 and later the Nguyen Dynasty in 1802. However, the French defeated Nguyen forces by 1862 and established a

colonial regime in the south. Resistance toward French rule remained. But with imperial power discredited, nationalistic notions arose in the early twentieth century (McLeod, Nguyen: 29). This led to the establishment of the Vietnamese Nationalist Party in 1927 under Nguyen Thai Hoc and the Vietnamese Communist Party in 1930 under Ho Chi Minh. From this point, these parties battled with each other and the French for control of Vietnam.

When the country was divided into North and South Vietnam by the Geneva Accords in 1954, there was another “southward march” of sorts. About 700,000 Catholics (roughly half of the Catholics in the north) left North Vietnam and headed south in anticipation of a more favorable regime under Ngo Dinh Diem (Nguyen 2003: 33). This precipitated a period of marked expansion in Catholic influence in the south. For instance, in a few years “about 10 percent of the population was Roman Catholic” (Pham 1969: 21). Churches grew phenomenally and more than 1,000 Catholic schools were built between 1953 and 1963 (Nguyen 2003: 33).

This rapid growth led to triumphalism among the Roman Catholic populace. Government cooperation was extended to the Catholics in building schools, the national radio carried Catholic programs, and government officials often took part in their festivals and processions. In accordance with the Asian concept of “saving face,” it is no surprise that the “common folks who suffered hardship and persecution found a triumphant church attractive” (Nguyen 2003: 34).¹⁸

¹⁸ However, few conversions came from those areas which were dominated by Buddhist sects.

On April 30, 1975, the capital of South Vietnam fell to the communist forces and the situation for Catholics rapidly changed. Peter Sam Cao Nguyen writes that “. . . although the Catholic Church in Vietnam was controlled and the number and movement of Catholic priests were limited by the government, the number of Catholic believers grew” and that at the beginning of the 21st century, the number of Catholics in Vietnam was “estimated at 9 percent of the Vietnamese population” (Nguyen 2003: 34, 35).

Many of those Vietnamese who left their homeland after the fall of Saigon were Catholics as well. In 2003, the number of Vietnamese people in the United States alone was estimated to be about 1.4 million. According to the U.S. Catholic Bishops about 25% of these Vietnamese are Catholics. This number includes those who converted to Catholicism after leaving Vietnam (Nguyen 2003: 35).

The Advent of Protestantism in Vietnam

In 1893, Albert B. Simpson, the founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance (CMA) said, “The southeastern peninsula of Asia has been much neglected. The great kingdom of An-Nam should be occupied for Christ” (Hefley 17). Four years later, an attempt to establish a station in Haiphong met with great resistance from “Satanic forces” (Pham 1970: 3) and had to be closed. An attempt was also made to reach the Vietnamese from Longchau, a station in South China. That attempt also failed. In 1899, A. B. Simpson made another appeal for Christian workers to “bring His gospel to Vietnam” (Pham 1970: 2). A group of missionaries answered that call, establishing the first permanent CMA mission in

1911 on property purchased in Danang. By 1915, a total of nine missionaries worked at the station.

Periods of persecution followed and government actions slowed the work.¹⁹ Even so, the number of converts continued to slowly grow and a church was established at Danang. After negotiations between the chairman of the CMA's China Mission and the Governor General, the persecutions ended and in those times new stations in Haiphong, Hanoi, Danang, and Hoian were opened (or re-opened) and the work grew again. In 1918, CMA preachers evangelized the city of Saigon, established a station there and appointed a Vietnamese pastor to undertake the work in that station (Pham 1970: 5). But persecution again came to the Christians. In 1926, believers were not permitted to worship in their churches and some Christians in Tam Ky, Lac Thanh, Truong An and other cities were threatened for their involvement with this foreign faith (Pham 1970: 11).

This suspicion that the church was an agency of foreign powers was seen as a serious hindrance to the spread of the gospel. In 1927, the CMA General Assembly in Danang organized a national Protestant church as a self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating entity (Pham 1970: 7, 10). This national church is no longer officially linked with the CMA; it is now recognized by the government as the Evangelical Church of Viet Nam (ECVN) - or in Vietnamese, the *Hội Thánh Tin Lành Việt Nam*.

By the 1950s, mission stations and churches had multiplied in Hoian, Tam Ky, Que Son, Hanoi, Haiphong, Hoa Binh, Lang Son, My Tho and other cities.

¹⁹ Four missionaries were forced out of the country by decree of the Governor General of French Indochina. Those that stayed were prevented from propagating the faith.

The CMA opened a publishing house in Hanoi and began publishing a Christian magazine. A Vietnamese translation of the entire Bible had been published in 1926 (and revised in 1956.) The CMA had also established a Bible school in Danang (later moved to Nha Trang). In the next few decades, Christian magazines were established as well as television and radio ministries. Additional Bible schools/colleges were organized and the church began to offer theological education by extension.

Soon, other Protestant denominations began to appear in Vietnam. Peter Sam Cao Nguyen describes the progress of the church in the last half century or so:

In 1968, the Protestant churches in South Vietnam had 334 communities, 131 pastors, 151 missionaries, and 68 seminarians, taking care of more than 50,000 baptized believers and 250,000 not-yet-baptized believers.

Following the communist takeover of South Vietnam in 1975, all foreign ministers were expelled from the South. As of the 1990s, there were about 800,000 Protestants in Vietnam, many of whom were tribal people of the Montagnard communities inhabiting the South's central highlands. Although the Vietnamese government has somewhat relaxed the control over religions in the past two decades, the authorities are still more suspicious of Protestant Christianity than of other religions (Nguyen 2003: 36).

Though Protestantism increased over the last half century, the church faced significant obstacles. Yet conversions continued into the mid-1970s and the ECVN established more churches/schools (Pham 1970: 11). Through these times of both growth and hardship, some Vietnamese Christians simply decided to leave Vietnam.

Southern Baptist missions were successfully launched in Vietnam during the late 1950s. But all these missionaries were expelled by the new communist

regime which took power in 1975. Though the government has more recently granted official recognition to the Baptist church, their missionaries have not been allowed to return. Even so the work continued to prosper. According to the Southern Baptist International Mission Board, “Baptists are widely acknowledged as the fastest-growing church group in Vietnam. There are now some 50,000 Baptists in 90 congregations in a dozen cities and provinces across the country” (IMB: 2).

Mennonite churches were planted in South Vietnam beginning in the 1960s. Many Mennonite churches (and other Protestant churches) were confiscated by the government following the communist takeover but some of their congregations re-appeared later at other locations. Still other believers began to meet in independent house fellowships. In any case, the Mennonite presence continued to grow in Saigon and expand to surrounding areas. In July of 2003, representatives of Mennonite churches from various parts of Vietnam met in Ho Chi Minh City to convene the first Mennonite Church Conference in Vietnam - fusing pre-1975 and post-1975 Mennonite churches into one body.

The United Methodist Church’s Board of Global Ministries is one of the latest groups to attempt to facilitate the spread of the gospel in Vietnam. Beginning in 1998, representatives from the Board of Global Ministries met with a group of Vietnamese Christians in Vietnam. Discussions with the Board of Global Ministries resulted in the sending of United Methodist missionaries to Vietnam. In 2002, Reverends Ut Vo and Karen Vo To established a United Methodist Church in Vietnam. The United Methodist movement has experienced

strong growth since its arrival. As of July 2009, the United Methodist Church reported that 74 churches had been established and were being served by 80 pastors. Most of these churches are in the Ho Chi Minh City area but five newer churches are in and around the northern city of Hanoi (Wright 1, 2).²⁰

The Arrival of Vietnamese Protestantism in the United States

Prior to 1975, most Vietnamese in the United States were either wives or children of American military personnel in Vietnam (or academics), and their number was basically insignificant. According to the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, only 650 Vietnamese arrived from 1950 to 1974. But the fall of Saigon City in the spring of 1975 precipitated an unprecedented Vietnamese Diaspora. Vietnamese Protestants left for various nations around the world, many finally settling in the United States.

The reasons for this choice began in 1957 with the communist infiltration of South Vietnam. The United States responded by sending thousands of military advisors. That number was increased in 1963 with the deaths of United States President John F. Kennedy and South Vietnam's President Ngo Dinh Diem. By 1967, American troops involved in Vietnam numbered about a half million (Karnow 697). After a millennium of domination by the Chinese and nearly a century of colonialization by the French, the Vietnamese would have had good

²⁰ The church has an active social ministry which provides job training for women and elementary school scholarships to children. In 2009, The United Methodist Church's Board of Global Ministries (in cooperation with church members in Vietnam) partnered with supporters from their West Ohio Conference to build a 7,800-square-foot ministry center near Ho Chi Minh City's airport. This center will be used to support pastoral training, health ministries, and other mission initiatives. With the exodus of many Christians since 1975, Vietnamese Protestants in Vietnam comprise about 1 percent of the Vietnamese population (Nguyen 2003: 37) . . . but that number is still growing.

reason to be suspicious of foreigners. But the years-long presence of so many American soldiers in South Vietnam to help them in their struggle with the communists may have made Viets more comfortable with them. Their years of assistance may have mitigated the tendency to view them with suspicion.

But in 1969, President Richard M. Nixon ordered the withdrawal of some troops from Vietnam. Peace talks were initiated in Paris in 1970. These talks ultimately led to the complete withdrawal of American troops in March of 1973. Now it was inevitable that the northern forces would prevail. The evacuation of the remaining American presence from Vietnam began on April 29, 1975, the day before Saigon was seized by North Vietnam's forces. Vietnamese who were family members of Americans or had other important connections with them were evacuated by military aircraft or by Navy vessels. But the majority had to find their own way out of the country. Within hours of the surrender, the first wave of Vietnamese left by helicopter, plane, boat - or on foot. The trickle soon swelled to flood. Though later refugees fled to many different countries, most of those in the first wave sought refuge in the United States (Nguyen 2003: 38, 39). See Table 1.

| Fiscal Years | Immigrants from Vietnam (excluding Refugees) | <i>Refugees arriving from Vietnam</i> |
|---------------------|---|--|
| 1975 | 3,039 | 125,000 |
| 1976 | 4,230 | 3,200 |
| 1977 | 4,629 | 1,900 |
| 1978 | 2,892 | 11,100 |
| 1979 | 2,065 | 44,500 |
| 1980 | 4,510 | 95,200 |
| 1981 | 2,238 | 65,279 |
| 1982 | 3,030 | 27,396 |
| 1983 | 3,275 | 22,819 |
| 1984 | 5,203 | 24,856 |
| 1985 | 5,120 | 25,222 |
| 1986 | 15,256 | 21,700 |
| 1987 | 11,489 | 19,656 |
| 1988 | 14,231 | 17,571 |
| 1989 | 25,957 | 21,924 |
| 1990 | 37,773 | 27,797 |
| 1991 | 43,939 | 28,396 |
| 1992 | 45,580 | 26,795 |
| 1993 | 29,365 | 31,401 |
| 1994 | 14,027 | 34,110 |
| 1995 | 13,157 | 32,250 |
| 1996 | 12,367 | 16,107 |
| 1997 | 16,222 | 6,612 |
| 1998 | 12,728 | 10,266 |
| 1999 | 15,890 | 9,622 |
| 2000 | 21,171 | 2,839 |
| 2001 | 25,180 | 3,109 |

Table 1. Immigrants/refugees arriving from Vietnam, Fiscal Years 1975 to 2001.

Those who remained in Vietnam began the arduous task of reconstruction but their rest from economic chaos and the violence of war did not last long. In 1978, Vietnam began an eleven-year conflict with Cambodia and the following year, China invaded Vietnam. There was also fear among some Vietnamese of

being sent to the newly established Communist “re-education camps.” The American government responded by passing the Refugee Act of 1980 which further eased restrictions on their immigration. Even the Vietnamese government facilitated the migration to some extent by establishing the Orderly Departure Program which allowed them to leave Vietnam for family reunions and for humanitarian reasons. As a result, hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese entered the United States from 1978 to 1986 (Niedzwiecki and Duong: 9).

During this period, the second wave of refugees/immigrants departed Vietnam. Hundreds of thousands left their homeland primarily by boats giving rise to the term “boat people.” This wave was characterized by a higher proportion of ethnic Chinese, Hmong, and other groups. Nevertheless, the majority were ethnic Vietnamese (Nguyen 2003: 39). Though nearly half of the first wave had been Roman Catholic, the second wave had a higher percentage of Buddhists. Many second-wave emigrants who left by boat landed in refugee camps - in the United States or in other parts of Asia.²¹

The first two waves of Vietnamese immigrants into the United States tended to be military officers, professionals and their families. Many were well-educated and financially more advantaged than those who came in later years. Often they had some familiarity with the English language. With marketable skills and a weaker language barrier, they more easily assimilated into American society than later immigrants.

²¹ Among other places immigrants sought refuge in Singapore, Thailand, Hong Kong, Korea, Cambodia, Malaysia, and the Philippines.

Eventually, the United States government passed additional laws to allow political prisoners and children of American military personnel and their families to enter the US. In 1992, Vietnamese immigration rose for a third time as many prisoners of the re-education camps were released and sponsored by their relatives to come to America. But members of this third wave of refugees were often received differently by their new fellow-citizens in the United States than earlier refugees. Americans perceived the earlier refugees as coming to America to escape political or religious persecution. But changes in Vietnam may have given Americans a different perspective. Many of the communist policies which had been pursued aggressively by the government of Vietnam were taking a toll on that nation's economy.

By 1985, there was widespread famine in Vietnam due to the disastrous failure of the communists' farm collectivization program. Thus many Vietnamese families emigrated due to both persecution *and economic concerns*. In 1986, the Vietnamese Communist Party began a program of liberal economic reforms called *Doi Moi* (literally, "renovation") similar to the Soviet *perestroika* (or "reconstruction") program of the same era. In the wake of these economic difficulties, those arrived from Vietnam in these years were less affluent - and thus more likely to be seen as economic opportunists or "fortune seekers" (Nguyen 2003: 39).

Interestingly, the "renovation" program launched in the mid-1980s may currently be having effects beyond the economic realm:

It is too early to discern *Doi Moi*'s long-term economic impact. It appears, however, that the loosening of social controls, increases in prosperity, and disillusionment with Marxism-Leninism are resulting in more participation in traditional religious activities. For example, pagodas in large cities openly celebrate major Buddhist holidays, and these are well attended in a festive atmosphere by practitioners. . . . In rural society also, Buddhist monks remain active, and pilgrimage sites such as famous pagodas are actively visited by the faithful.

Ancestor worship is also experiencing a revival . . . The continuing influence of popular Animism is evident in the plethora of shrines to accident victims . . . In sum, despite the Party's official atheism, traditional religious beliefs, practices and organizations give every appearance of maintaining or even strengthening their influence (McLeod and Dieu: 62, 63).

This new openness to religion may have spurred the recent advances of Baptist, Methodist, and other initiatives in Vietnam. It may have also served to reduce the impetus for Vietnamese to emigrate. Over the course of several decades, the hostility between the US government and the communist regime of Vietnam slowly healed.²²

Vietnamese Protestantism in the Greater Ohio Valley Region

In 1975, the U.S. government had passed the Indochina Migration and Refugee Act allowing special status to the refugees entering the United States. These events prompted about 125,000 Vietnamese refugees to enter the US that year (Niedzwiecki and Duong: 9). Through the Indochinese Assistance and Refugee Assistance Act, passed that same year, four refugee camps had been set up in the United States. The earliest of the refugee camps was at Camp Pendleton in California, opening on April 29, 1975. That was followed by the establishment

²² On July 11, 1995, the US established full diplomatic ties with Vietnam.

of camps at Fort Chaffee in Arkansas and Eglin Air Force Base in Florida. The fourth refugee camp had been opened at Fort Indiantown Gap in Pennsylvania on May 28, 1975. These centers housed thousands of Vietnamese immigrants as they waited for employment offers/resettlement. The location of these refugee camps tended to determine where Vietnamese immigrants first established legal residency in the US (Ebaugh and Chafetz 28). From the geographical areas surrounding these camps they slowly dispersed to other regions of the country. Many immigrants have since relocated to Texas or other areas on the gulf coast where the climate more closely approximates that of Vietnam. Vietnamese also may be attracted to that region by opportunities to be involved in coastal fishing enterprises (a major industry in Vietnam). Though the largest populations of Vietnamese Americans still live in California and Texas,²³ significant populations may be found in many other US cities, including New Orleans, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Seattle and Washington, DC. The U.S. Census Bureau's 2006-2008 American Community Survey estimates of Vietnamese populations in the area addressed by this study are reflected Table 2 below.

| State | Vietnamese population |
|--------------|------------------------------|
| Indiana | 8,232 |
| Kentucky | 4,755 |
| Ohio | 15,620 |
| Tennessee | 8,547 |
| | |
| <i>Total</i> | <i>37,154</i> |

Table 2. Estimated Vietnamese populations in the GOVR (2008).

²³ United States Census Bureau figures from the year 2000 indicated a Vietnamese population in California of 447,032 persons. The same source shows the population of Texas to have included 134,961 persons of Vietnamese lineage. These two states alone contain nearly half of all Vietnamese Americans.

Since 1975, millions of Indochinese refugees have been admitted to the United States. Vietnamese refugees were often sponsored by churches, government agencies, non-profit organizations – and sometimes by private citizens. Missionary endeavors were organized by such groups as World Vision, Youth with a Mission, World Relief, World Concerns, and the CMA, along with help from the Red Cross and even the Young Men's Christian Association (Ebaugh and Chafetz 29).

While Christian organizations were involved in presenting the gospel, they and other organizations often provided programs/services related to childcare, college placement, and recreation. Some offered programs aimed at introducing the Vietnamese to their new culture - including English as a second language (ESL) courses. The Vietnamese who arrived over the decades were primarily Buddhist, Catholic or Protestant. Yet many Vietnamese were converted to some form of Protestant Christianity in refugee camps (either in the United States or other countries); others were already members of Protestant churches in Vietnam. Often, these converts ended up attending previously existing, English-speaking churches. In other cases, they joined together to form new Vietnamese-speaking Protestant congregations.

This research identified Vietnamese congregations in three of the four states covered by this study: Ohio, Kentucky and Tennessee. In Ohio, Protestant congregations were found in the cities of Columbus and Dayton. In Kentucky, similar churches were located in Bowling Green and in Louisville. In Tennessee,

Vietnamese Protestant congregations were identified in the cities of Knoxville, Nashville and Memphis.

Various versions of the Bible - or *Kinh Thánh* have been used by Vietnamese congregations. The version most used by Vietnamese Protestants is the Cadman version. This version, published in 1926, was originally based on the English King James Version. It was translated into French by CMA missionary personnel for Vietnamese people who knew the French language. Later, Vietnamese translated the French version into the Vietnamese language. Unfortunately, this Vietnamese version uses somewhat antiquated language with which many Vietnamese Americans are not very familiar. Other denominations have adapted the Cadman version for use within their denominations. The United Methodist version - published in 2008 - is called specifically, the *Kinh Thánh Cựu Ước và Tân Ước*. The Baptist churches in Kentucky use a slightly different Vietnamese translation which was published in 2002; however, it unfortunately shares the same title. The congregations studied in Tennessee also used this Baptist *Kinh Thánh* version.²⁴ Similarly, hymns and choruses are mostly taken from different hymnal versions which also share the same name specifically, *Thánh Ca tôn vinh Đức Chúa Trời*. The Baptist version of the *Thánh Ca* hymnal was published in 1997 and is used in the Bowling Green, Louisville, and Memphis congregations. The Vietnamese United Methodist *Thánh Ca* hymnal used in the Ohio churches was published in 2005.

²⁴ However, the *New International Version* is used for the youth in English services/Sunday school.

The Vietnamese people who immigrated to the U.S. since the fall of Saigon City arrived from a culture whose people have suffered many tragedies at the hands of both foreigners and their own countrymen. Undoubtedly, these events have impacted their views of Christianity. Centuries of domination by China and the mingling of missionary work with colonial activities have tended to foster distrust of foreigners in general – and Christians, in particular. However, Christianity was well received by some Vietnamese and the American presence during the war has, at times, mitigated that distrust.

Some Vietnamese immigrants are Christians who have clung to their faith through great adversity. Others have suffered horrific treatment at the hands of supposedly “Christian” Americans - and so view Christianity warily. Still others have been tremendously helped by individual Christians or churches - or church-related organizations. At any rate, (in addition to ancient cultural influences and colonial influences) the events of the Vietnam War and the postwar period have shaped the perspectives of Vietnamese immigrants toward Christianity in a variety of ways.

In summary, early Vietnamese refugees settled in vicinity of the resettlement camps that were set up at the end of the war. Slowly, these immigrants migrated from there to other parts of the United States. In the greater Ohio Valley Region, populations claiming Vietnamese lineage grew large enough to result in the founding of Protestant congregations in the states of Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee.

Vietnamese Culture

Besides the historical involvements with Chinese, French and American cultures, it is important to note that other groups influenced the cultural traits of Vietnamese immigrants to the United States. Apart from the ethnic Vietnamese, the small minorities of westerners, and the ethnic Chinese, there were numerous other Southeast Asians (particularly Cambodians and Laotians) in the country as well. While most Vietnamese citizens are ethnically Vietnamese, there are two notable groups which are not. In the central plains, the Cham people are descended from the citizens of the ancient empire called Champa that was conquered by the Viets in the fifteenth century. Likewise, in the Mekong Delta region, the Khmers Krom represent the remains of the powerful Khmer Empire which once controlled southern Vietnam. Both the Cham and Khmer cultures are more Indianized than the ethnic Vietnamese culture.

The Vietnamese Language

The Vietnamese language is a tonal language with three significant variations in pronunciation the northern, central, and southern dialects. Each word is formed with at least one vowel that is voiced with either level or changing pitch. Depending on regional dialect, there may be four to six of these pitch contours, or tonal changes, found in the spoken language (McLeod, Dieu: 11). When written, a word's tonal contour is indicated by the presence (or absence) of diacritical marks above/beneath the vowel. There are a number of different symbols which may mark the vowels of words in order to describe the pitch contour associated with the corresponding syllable. If a vowel is unmarked in a

particular word, the syllable associated with that vowel has a flat mid-level pitch. For vowels which are marked, the various changes in pitch are associated with each marking as shown below:

| | |
|----------------|---|
| <i>có</i> | moves from a medium to a high pitch |
| <i>chào</i> | moves from a high to a medium pitch |
| <i>chị</i> | moves from a medium to a very low pitch |
| <i>mãi mãi</i> | moves from a medium to high to medium to a high pitch |
| <i>khỏe</i> | moves from a medium pitch lower, then to a high pitch |

It is important to understand the tonal aspect of the language since the pitch contour affects the meaning of each word.²⁵

The Vietnamese language also reflects the cultural emphasis on family hierarchy and social status. The language is replete with indicators of status and relationship:

Within the family, status was based on a person's relationship to other family members in terms of age, sex, generation, paternal or maternal lineage, and marriage. Older siblings are addressed as *anh* ("older brother") or *chị* ("older sister"). Younger siblings are addressed generally as *em* and may be referred to as *em trai* ("younger brother") or *em gái* ("younger sister"). The father's older siblings are called *bác*; the mother's siblings are called *cau* (for males) and *di* (for females); younger siblings of the father are called *chú* (for males) and *thím* (for females). Grandfathers and grandmothers are called *bà* and *ông*, respectively, with a further distinction made between paternal (*ông bà nội*, the "inside" grandparents) and maternal (*ông bà ngoại*, the "outside" grandparents). Although the basic equivalent to the English "I" is *tôi*, it is usually replaced with a word more specific to the relationship between the speaker and the interlocutor. For example, one's older sister would be addressed as *chị* ("elder sister"), while the speaker would refer to his- or herself as *em*, or "younger sibling." (McLeod and Dieu: 13)

²⁵ Other diacritical marks may change the pronunciation in other ways. (For instance, *a* is pronounced "ah" - but *ă* is pronounced "ay").

Some these same terms are also used outside the family to indicate differences between the speaker and others with respect to gender, age, status, or profession.²⁶

Vietnamese Religion

Most Vietnamese practice a blend of animism with the *tam giáo* or “three religions” imported from China (that is, Mahayana Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism). Vietnamese often follow more than one faith tradition at a time, not viewing them as contradictory. The animist view is that spirits inhabit not only humans and animals, but also objects such as rocks, trees, and rivers. Chief among these spirits was *Ông Trời* (literally, “Mr. Heaven”). According to Peter C. Phan, the early Vietnamese viewed *Ông Trời* as “a personal, transcendent, benevolent, and just God, the creator of the universe, the source of all life, and supreme judge” (Phan 1996: 24, 25). There was no specific temple for *Ông Trời* but sacrifice was offered annually to him only by the emperor (who is considered to be a “Son of Heaven”). Though the people themselves did not render cult to “Mr. Heaven” they did pray to him and recognize him as both omniscient and omnipotent. It was thought that *Ông Trời* directed the operations of the universe with wisdom, justice, and mercy in such a way that evil was punished and good was rewarded. However, they also recognized the influence of three other categories of spiritual beings: the *than*, the *ma*, and the *qui*.²⁷

²⁶ *Ông*, which basically means “grandfather,” is commonly used to address men who are older or of higher status but also men of any age who are casual acquaintances or business associates. *Bà*, (literally “grandmother,”) is used to refer to married women or to single women who are older than the speaker. *Cô* (meaning “aunt”), is used to address an unmarried women or single women who are older than the speaker.

²⁷ The *than* were essentially guardian spirits for a specific village, district, or larger area. The term *ma* was used in reference to dead bodies but also referred to the spirits of those not properly buried

Ancestor veneration is another prominent Vietnamese religious practice. Humans are thought to have several different entities which make up two different types of soul (*hồn* and *via*).²⁸ At the time of one's death, the *via* spirits remained near the body but the *hồn* spirits departed for the next world. Some *via* could be troublesome; others could be helpful. Since these spirits survived after a person's body died, they could be petitioned for help. Thus appropriate care is taken to ensure proper burial and worship of ancestors so that they will provide for the family's welfare and offer their wisdom and protection. In Vietnam, rituals are customarily performed to honor a deceased ancestor on the anniversary of that ancestor's death and at the annual celebration of *Tết* (New Year) at a family altar. These rituals often involve the giving of food/drink, prostration before an ancestor's image, and the burning of incense.

The cult of ancestors is practiced by Vietnamese who may also be adherents of Buddhism, Taoism, or Confucianism. Also, some Catholics have been known to practice a modified form of ancestor veneration even though such practice was officially prohibited by the church for many years. Peter C. Phan comments on the problem posed by ancestor worship to missionary work in Asia and the historical Catholic views:

and those who had no one to offer sacrifices to them. Finally, *qui* were an angry sort of demons who did much evil among the people. (However, the *ma* spirits could also be troublesome.) Beliefs such as these eventually led some Vietnamese to adopt the custom of giving their children repulsive and derogatory names (such as "dog," "stupid," or "pig") in order to make them less attractive targets for attack by evil spirits (McLeod and Dieu: 140) - and calling the eldest son *anh hai* ("older brother two") because the firstborn son was a more attractive target for evil spirits (McLeod and Dieu: 44).

²⁸ A male human being is thought to be composed of three *hồn* and seven *via* (also called *phách*). A female human would be composed of three *hồn* and nine *via*. The *hồn* are more spiritual in nature while *via* are more material.

The cult of ancestors posed a difficult challenge to the earliest missionaries to China and other countries influenced by Confucianism. Basically, the question was whether the cult was theologically acceptable. At issue was the nature of this cult, that is, whether it has a “religious” character or is a purely civil or political ceremony. If the former, then it is superstition and must be forbidden; if the latter, then it may be tolerated, and Christian participation in it would be permissible, due care being exercised to prevent misunderstanding and scandal. (Phan 2003: 69)

Though several popes have condemned the practice, the Catholic Church’s latest decision is that the cult of ancestors is acceptable Christian practice when performed in accordance with a particular method of inculturation proposed by John Paul II. At any rate, McLeod and Dieu believe the practice to be so pervasive that they write, “even the most Westernized Vietnamese, in Vietnam or abroad, maintain an ancestral altar in the home before which they burn incense or make offerings” (McLeod and Dieu: 45).²⁹

Vietnamese worship at the community level included the appeasement of local guardian deities which were invoked primarily for protection of the village. Worship in the villages typically involves the ritual sacrifice of animals such as buffaloes or pigs. Since the 15th century, these sacrifices have taken place in a large communal house. Many animists honor their family’s ancestors to get help concerning family-related issues and worship the local guardian deity to obtain help with village-related issues.

During the early centuries of Chinese dominance, the philosophical Taoism of China had little effect in Vietnam. But the more religious and “magical” form of Taoism which became influential among the people merely

²⁹ Some scholars have suggested that ancestor worship emerged from an earlier animistic worship of tribal guardian spirits.

brought new deities (such as the “Jade Emperor” and members of his court) into the Vietnamese spiritual universe. Thus Taoism was easily subsumed into the existing folk belief system. Vietnamese Taoists eventually became spirit mediums, fortune-tellers, geomancers and healers.

The Confucian rulers who held sway in Vietnam for centuries generally considered the animism and Taoism of the people to be superstition.³⁰ Yet their Confucian principles were compatible enough with practices such as ancestor worship to allow further blending in the “melting pot” of Vietnamese religion. Concerning spirits of the dead, Confucius taught that “to devote oneself earnestly to one’s duty to humanity, and while respecting the spirits, to keep aloof from them, may be called wisdom” (Noss: 305). Nevertheless, it is easy to see how beliefs in ancestor veneration fit well with the Confucian concern for filial piety. Also, the role of the emperor in offering sacrifices for the people was compatible with the Confucian idea that the emperor should be benevolent and enjoy the loyalty of his subjects.

As mentioned earlier, religion in Vietnam is strongly influenced by Buddhism in addition to animism, Taoism, and Confucianism. The most popular brand of Buddhism in Vietnam is the devotional Pure Land sect. However, some of the more elite Vietnamese have been drawn to the sects which emphasize meditation (*Thien* or “Zen” Buddhism). In the Pure Land sect, there is an

³⁰ Confucius had taught that a particular ethical system and social hierarchy was necessary for human beings to live together in harmony with the cosmic order. Specifically, he taught the value of propriety (in Chinese, *li*), seeking the good of others (*ren*), righteousness through the execution of justice (*yi*), wisdom (*zhi*), and faithfulness (*xin*). These principles were applied to the “five great relationships” in such way as to regulate conduct between father and son, elder and younger brothers, husband and wife, elders and juniors, and finally, rulers and their subjects.

emphasis on devotion to bodhisattvas and the teaching that all people would be enlightened by the working of great compassion as evidenced in Amida Buddha's vow. While this sect's teachings have much in common with other Buddhist groups (nonduality, etc.), they differ from them in important ways.³¹

These imported Buddhist teachings also blended with Vietnamese folk beliefs in varied ways. For instance, most Mahayana Buddhists hold that there is no permanent self which survives death. Reincarnation is a much more subtle process similar to passing the flame from one candle to another. But according to Vietnamese Buddhist belief, it is the *hồn* spirits associated with the deceased which survive and are reincarnated after death. Also, the blending of these religions is exemplified in the addition of various "enlightened beings" (Buddhas and bodhisattvas) as subjects to be petitioned for help.³² These beings compete with members of the already crowded Vietnamese pantheon for the devotion of Vietnamese religionists.

Catholic Christianity came in the 1500s. Since the missionaries soon learned Vietnamese, they were able to present the gospel directly (rather than through interpreters) in a way that could be easily understood. The missionaries worked to distribute food and were active as community leaders. Their preaching and the frequently reported experiences of the miraculous appealed to the

³¹ Primarily, the emphasis is on achieving enlightenment not by self-effort but by "other" effort (specifically, the working of the great compassion of Amida's vow). Faithful devotion to Amida brings all to the Pure Land, a realm of awakened and liberated beings. Though teachings concerning the Pure Land have evolved over the centuries, it is not thought of as a geographic place today - but rather a realm of enlightenment.

³² Of course, many Vietnamese immigrants also interpret their experiences through a Buddhist lens. For instance, some "boat people" believe that their petitions to Quan Âm convinced her to help them through the dangers of the high seas in order to find peace and prosperity in the United States.

villagers and the religion began to grow. Before long, indigenous priests were ordained and the religion began to spread even more rapidly. However, many non-Catholic Vietnamese grew to resent the missionaries with their Vietnamese priests and followers. Persecution arose when Catholics began withdrawing from public ceremonies.³³ Frequent collaboration with colonial authorities heightened the animosity of some Vietnamese toward the Catholic presence.

When government leaders saw Catholicism as a threat to Confucian ideals, a series of anti-Catholic edicts were passed in the 1830s. But these backfired when the French used the resulting persecutions of Catholics as a justification to invade Vietnam. Ultimately, a Catholic leader did arise in South Vietnam (Ngo Dinh Diem) but his leadership was both corrupt and ineffective. Since the communists unified the country in 1975, Catholicism has grown only a little. Yet there are still perhaps a half million Catholics remaining in Vietnam (McLeod and Dieu: 59).

The more recent easing of repression has helped to revitalize goddess worship in Vietnam. The cults of Bà Chúa Xứ (the Lady of the Realm), Đỉnh Cô (the Palace Damsel) and other deities are gaining popularity.³⁴ Another of the

³³ For instance, the missionaries forbade their converts to participate in the worship of village deities.

³⁴ At the base of Sam Mountain just inside Vietnam's border with Cambodia sits an impressive shrine complex dedicated to a renowned goddess, Bà Chúa Xứ. The Lady of the Realm, also known as the Lady of Châu Đốc (the local town) is likely the most widely venerated of the many female deities of Vietnam. Her devotees participate in pilgrimages that rank among the largest in the country. The nearby village of Vinh Te sponsors a massive festival for Bà Chúa Xứ each year. The primary acts of worship of Bà Chúa Xứ include the bathing of her image and the changing of her robes (performed by elderly women), sacrifices performed by the Bà Chúa Xứ's cult committee, an appeal for protection and peace, and several operatic performances. In Long Hai village, Đỉnh Cô (the Palace Damsel) is venerated in festival on the twelfth day of the second month of the lunar year. Her shrine is in a "palace" where she shares the altar area with certain other female deities. She is considered to be a protector of fisherman and of other seagoing folk.

Vietnamese goddesses who has great appeal is known as Bà Đen or the Black Lady. Some Vietnamese Buddhists identify her as being the same as the renowned bodhisattva Quan Âm (in Chinese, Kuan Yin).³⁵

Literature

Many traditional Vietnamese stories, proverbs and poems have “morals” which may be useful towards presenting a contextually appropriate expression of scriptural truth. For instance, a Vietnamese traditional legend which describes how rice became so tiny illustrates how one person’s action can have big consequences for many people. Such a story might illustrate how the sin nature came upon all humanity as a result of the actions of Adam and Eve. Similarly, there are sayings which teach moral principles. For example, one proverb says “there is always a higher mountain.” It teaches humility by implying that (no matter how good you think you are) there is always someone better.

One of the most widely known stories among Vietnamese folks is Nguyen Du’s *Truyện Kiều* (or “The Tale of Kiều”). This story is set in ancient China and describes a woman’s tragic-heroic struggle to free herself from the karma of her former lives. In the story, she is repeatedly forced to serve masters whom she judges as unworthy of loyalty. Many Vietnamese feel that the portrayals of her suffering are penetratingly relevant to experiences in their own lives. Often Vietnamese folk quote passages from the work and relate strongly to the main

Many Vietnamese who fled past persecutions pay homage to her for their successful escapes (McLeod and Dieu: 217).

³⁵ Her fame derives from the numerous stories concerning her aid to various political and military leaders. For instance, she is credited with providing refuge for Nguyễn Phúc Ánh, the eighteenth century king who founded the Nguyễn dynasty.

character, Kieu. The Vietnamese have a rich storehouse of traditional folktales but also very specific genres which correspond to historical perspectives on political ideology from the colonial era to the communist era.³⁶

Music

Traditional Vietnamese music makes use of a wide range of musical instruments. Wind instruments may be flutelike (such as the *dịch* and *tiêu*) or similar to an oboe (the *kèn*). Stringed instruments include monochords (*dàn độc huyền*, and *dàn bầu*), 2-stringed lutes (*dàn kìm*, *dàn nguyệt*, *dàn doan*, *dàn nhât*, and *dàn xên*), 3-stringed lutes (*dàn tam* and *dàn đáy*), and a 4-stringed lute (*ty-bà*). A 16-stringed zither (*dàn tranh* or *dàn thập lục*) is also sometimes used as well as a number of types of fiddles (*dàn cò*, *dàn nhị*, *dàn gáo*, and *dàn hồ*). Among these instruments, the most popular in Vietnam are the monochord (*dàn bầu*) and the 2-stringed and 4-stringed lutes (*dàn nguyệt* and *ty-bà*, respectively). Percussion instruments used include several types of drums (*dai cô*, *tiêu cô*, *trống nhạc*, and *trống cơm*), and wood pieces (*phách* and *mỗ*). The use of various metal

³⁶ For instance, the colonial-era literature was the first to adopt French styles and literary concerns. It was written mostly from a colonialist perspective in the form of essays, poetry, novels. It also included translations of European works such as *Les Misérables* or Chinese works such as *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. The populist or realist literature which arose in the 1930s and for several decades afterwards portrayed “reality” as viewed through a Marxist lens. The “resistance” literature of the mid-twentieth century was associated with more blatant and revolutionary attitudes. The “marking time” literature of the same period was relatively free of political commitment and more often dealt with issues related to wartime life in South Vietnam. These stories tended to be more individualistic and often contained romantic themes. Finally, the “renovation” literature, produced in the wake of *doi moi*, allowed authors to explore themes which had been taboo under the rigid communism of the 1970s. This new political environment has produced literature which is not only individualistic but more sharply critical of collective experience. For instance, Duong Thu Huong’s *Tieu Thuyet Vo De* even addresses the hypocrisy of drunken Party officials dining elegantly while a nearby peasant relishes a piece of moldy bread (McLeod and Dieu: 87).

bells (*chuông* and *chung*), cymbals (*chap* and *choã*), and gongs (*chiêng*, *lênh*, and *thanh-la*) for percussion is also common (Deschênes, 1).

More recently, Vietnamese musicians in the south began to make use of European instruments - notably, the mandolin, guitar and violin. However, the guitar is commonly modified by carving deep hollows between the frets. This allows the musician to change the pitch by depressing the string further. Guitars typically have four or five strings rather than the usual six. The guitars (and violins) often use alternate methods of tuning.

Vietnamese music is characterized by a high degree of improvisation (particularly in the introduction to the song) and some ornamentation which depend on the genre, region of the song's origin, and the instrument.³⁷ Regardless of the genre, melodies are influenced by the tonal aspects of the Vietnamese language. In traditional Vietnamese music, the words and the music are written so that the tonal aspects of the language are reflected in the melody.

The potential conflict between melodic movement in a western hymn and the tonal aspects of the Vietnamese language makes it difficult to translate the hymn's lyrics literally while retaining the same melody. Words which are closer in meaning to those of the original lyrics may be replaced with different words that have pitch contours that better follow the melody. The translator's choice of words can have far reaching effects on the outcome of the process. For instance, when singing "Jesus Loves Me," the words would be translated literally as *Dạ*,

³⁷ Like most East Asian music, traditional Vietnamese music is modal and tends to contain melodies based on major and minor pentatonic modes. Often a fourth degree harmony is employed, giving the song a distinctively East Asian sound. Yet melody is emphasized more than harmony.

Jêsus yêu tôi. The final word in this phrase, *tôi*, has a flat tonal aspect. However, since the melody requires the last word to be sung at a higher pitch than the word before it, the effect is to induce an upward lilt to its tonal aspect. Thus the last word, *tôi*, becomes *tôi*. This changes the meaning of the phrase to “Yes, Jesus loves darkness” – a significant departure from the song’s original theological content. Similarly, when the melody continues in the next line, the last word is sung at a lower pitch than the word before it, changing *tôi* to *tôi*. This changes the meaning of the phrase to “Yes, Jesus loves bad” – an even worse result.

Thus the translation of songs (while keeping the melody) very often requires slightly changing the meaning of the song. For instance, in the first line of the refrain, the final pitch is a minor third above the preceding pitch. Therefore, instead of the literal translation of “Yes, Jesus loves me” to *Dạ, Jêsus yêu tôi*, the song was translated *Jêsus yêu tôi lắm* – that is, “Jesus loves me very much.” The addition of the word *lắm* allows for the use of a rising pitch contour – and the resultant change in meaning is far more acceptable. In the next line (where the final pitch descends - but only one whole step), a different solution is required. The translator rendered it *Phải, tôi được Chúa yêu* (roughly, “I can have God who loves”). The addition of the word *yêu* uses a flat pitch contour – and still the change in lyric’s meaning is acceptable.

Dr. Phong Nguyen at the Institute for Vietnamese Music in Kent, Ohio has noted several Vietnamese musical styles that have been brought to the United States:

A great variety of Vietnamese musical genres is performed in the United States today; these include *dan ca* (folk songs), *cai lung*

(southern Vietnamese "reformed" theater), *don ca tai tu* (or *tai tu*, a genre of southern chamber music), Buddhist chant, *chau van* ritual music, and *tan nhac* (popular music). Because most Vietnamese in the United States came from southern Vietnam, most of this music has a southern Vietnamese origin. Other religious music includes music of the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao religious sects, as well as music for Roman Catholic ceremonies. Two fundamental traits of Vietnamese musical culture, which is attempting to survive in America, are 1) the importance of the tonal nature of the Vietnamese language as it applies to vocal music, and 2) the modal nature of Vietnamese instrumental music. (Nguyen, 2003: 2)

In the U.S., the traditional *dan ca*, *cài lương* and *tai tu* forms are the most popular. *Dan ca* music originated with Vietnamese peasants. These songs are identifiable by their relatively simple melodies and use of vernacular language. *Cài lương* music arose in southern Vietnam in the early 20th century and has been in decline since the 1980s.³⁸ *Cài lương* ensembles may also include the *vi cam* or *vio long* (violin) and the *lục huyền cam* or *ghì ta* (the modified guitar with a scalloped fretboard). *Tai tu* songs center on themes of nostalgia, love of country, and love of family. The most popular form of *tai tu* music is the highly innovative *vọng cổ* style (Nguyen, 2003: 2).³⁹

Vietnamese Buddhists and Catholics each brought their styles of religious music to the United States, too. Buddhists primarily use chants (*tụng kinh*) which may be accompanied by ceremonial ensembles. For prayers and other recitations, Vietnamese Catholics employ a distinctive sort of chanting known as *đọc kinh* (or

³⁸ In the last few decades, *cài lương*-style music has also been played in festivals honoring the goddess *Bà Chúa Xứ* (the Lady of the Realm). It also has some popularity among adherents of the Cao Dai faith. Originally connected with reformed theater, it is much more complex and usually involves the use of traditional Vietnamese instruments. Thus there are fewer performers of this music in the United States.

³⁹ The *vọng cổ* style is also used in the performance of some more recent forms of *cài lương* (reformed theater) music.

bài ca nguyên) which is antiphonal between the worship leader and congregation.

They construct the melody of *đọc kinh* by starting the first syllable with an arbitrary pitch given by the leader. That note functions as a baseline around which the subsequent notes are positioned according to the pitch contours of the language. The melodies need not be written down using music notation since the pitches of the melody are determined by the tonal contours of the words being chanted. Typically three pitches are involved (a tonic, a whole step beneath the tonic, and a perfect fourth beneath the tonic).⁴⁰ This style is used to intone almost the entire Vietnamese Catholic mass except for some readings, proclamation, and announcements (Zaragoza 1).

Protestant worship music in Vietnam is largely taken from one or more editions of a hymnal called the *Thánh Ca*.⁴¹ It is published by the *Hội Thánh Tin Lành Việt Nam* (or ECVN). Many hymns included in the *Thánh Ca* are familiar Western hymns such as “How Great Thou Art” (*Thánh Chúa Siêu Việt*) and “God Will Take Care of You” (*Chúa Sẽ Lo Toan*) which have been translated into the Vietnamese language. Some of the *Thánh Ca*’s hymns are written by Vietnamese composers – particularly those in more recent editions. Most editions contain songs with verses in both Vietnamese and English.

In the last decade or so, some popular Christian praise and worship music has been translated into Vietnamese. Among others, these songs include Jack

⁴⁰ The rhythm, however, does not correspond to the natural cadence of the language. Each syllable is simply given about the same duration with pauses at the end of each phrase.

⁴¹ Catholics make use of the *Thánh Ca Việt Nam* hymnal. Most of its hymns were composed by Vietnamese authors although some are western hymns which have been translated into the Vietnamese language.

Hayford's "Majesty" (*Vinh Quang Rạng Ngời*) and Don Moen's "God Will Make a Way" (*Chúa Luôn Mở Lối*). Though some congregations' members are resistant, the popularity of these more modern songs has risen in recent years.

Festivals

The New Year's Festival or *Tết Nguyên-dan* is by far the most important and most widely observed festival among Vietnamese in Vietnam and among Vietnamese Americans in the United States. It is often called simply *Tết* (which literally means "festival"). It usually occurs in the spring but its exact date varies widely on the Gregorian calendar.⁴² Celebrants wear special clothes and prepare special foods in order to mark the occasion and attempts are made to reconcile any outstanding debts. Rituals are performed to honor ancestors and to pay respects to various household gods. Before the door of each house, a *cây nêu* (bamboo "tree") is planted to attract benevolent spirits and repel evil ones. It is decorated with leaves, gold-colored and silver-colored paper ornaments, and wind chimes. A fish ornament was also hung on the tree which, according to lore, would grow wings and at the appropriate moment fly the household gods to the Jade Emperor to report on the events of the past year. The Jade Emperor then determined whether to reward or punish the household in the year to come. Firecrackers are also employed at this time to scare away malevolent spirits.⁴³ Perhaps the most important ritual of the festival is the *lễ rước ông bà* or "ancestor-welcoming ritual." The ancestors are invoked and invited to join with

⁴² Vietnamese have traditionally used a lunar calendar of 355 days rather than the Gregorian calendar favored by western nations. An intercalary month is inserted between the third and four lunar months every third or fourth year to reconcile the calendar to the solar cycle.

⁴³ The good spirits are not thought to be afraid of these sounds.

the living relatives in the celebration of *Tết*. The ritual involves offerings of food and drink amidst the burning of incense.

Another major festival is *Tết Trung-thu* (the Mid-Autumn Festival) on the fifteenth day of the eighth lunar month. Westerners often refer to this as the “Moon Festival” since it celebrates an emperor’s journey to the moon (the gift of a Taoist saint).⁴⁴ Lesser festivals include *Lễ Hàn-Thực*, (the Cold Foods Festival), *Lễ Thanh-minh* (the Pure Brightness Festival) and *Lễ Đoan-ngô* (the Double-Five Festival).⁴⁵

There is always a danger that Vietnamese Christians who were former adherents of these cults may bring syncretism into the church. Philip Taylor describes the practices of one Catholic toward Mary as being similar to those of one of Bà Chúa Xứ’s devotees: “She said she made offerings of fruit, flowers, candles and incense to Mary each night” (Taylor: 230). She admitted asking Mary for success and good health but also prayed to be more like her. Yet she believes in the responsiveness of the Lady of the Realm. The similarity between Christian worship and the cult of the Lady may be a useful bridge for cross-cultural evangelism; it also suggests a potential danger. The greater the similarity between the two belief systems, the more difficult syncretism may be to detect.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Children parade at night dancing with lanterns. Those of marriageable age engage in flirtatious “alternate-verse singing” (a sort of poetic teasing between couples). Older folks sit with friends and family drinking tea and eating special foods like boiled snails and various seasonal fruits (McLeod and Dieu: 161).

⁴⁵ *Lễ Hàn-Thực* honors a Vietnamese general who supposedly restored a Chinese Emperor to his throne. *Lễ Thanh-minh* celebrates the beauty of spring. *Lễ Đoan-ngô* occurs on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month. It is a time to ask local deities for help or protection through the summer months in this tropical climate (especially, from diseases or parasites).

⁴⁶ Such confusion would be less likely among Vietnamese Protestant Christians (because of their rejection of Marian devotion). Nonetheless, it will be important to be alert for signs of such confusion in order to maintain properly contextualized practices among Vietnamese Christians.

CHAPTER 3

THE VIETNAMESE UNITED METHODIST CHURCHES OF OHIO

Vietnamese Protestant Churches in the state of Ohio were located in the cities of Dayton and Columbus. These are United Methodist congregations; they share a single pastor who arrived at the charge in 2008. Both churches are associated with the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church and each holds their worship services in buildings which also house larger, English-speaking United Methodist congregations.

The Vietnamese United Methodist Church of Dayton

The *Hội Thánh Tin Lành Giám Lý* (“Vietnamese United Methodist Church” or more literally, “Methodist Evangelical Church”) of Dayton, Ohio was founded in 1993 by Reverend Paul Tran. Rev. Tran pastored the church for about 14 years. The current pastor, Reverend Esther Dang, was appointed to the charge in November of 2008. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of California at San Diego, a Master of Divinity degree from Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C., and a Master of Theology degree from Princeton Theological Seminary in New Jersey. She served as a chaplain for the Orange County (California) Jail Ministry and holds a License for Pastoral Ministry from the Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church.

Reverend Dang was born into a Christian family and her father was a Christian and Missionary Alliance (CMA) pastor. She considers this to be a great blessing since many Vietnamese people have not even heard the gospel. She

received her call to Christian ministry in her late teen years. Since arriving in the United States, she has enhanced her knowledge of other churches and denominations by experiencing worship in Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist and Catholic congregations. In addition to her training, she draws from her life experiences both in the United States and in Vietnam.

The members of the Vietnamese United Methodist Church of Dayton participate in the ministry of the church by interacting with members of the local Vietnamese community in Dayton. Sometimes they will distribute Vietnamese Christian literature to places where the Vietnamese people are likely to go (for instance, oriental groceries). There has also been discussion of starting a church website but this has a lower priority since many Vietnamese do not have internet access. The Vietnamese United Methodist Church of Dayton was visited on May 10, 2009 and again on June 7, 2009.⁴⁷

The services were predominantly – though not entirely – in the Vietnamese language. Some verses of the hymns were sung in English and the scripture reading was given in both English and Vietnamese. All scripture readings were from the Vietnamese United Methodist translation – specifically, the *Kinh Thánh Cựu Ước và Tân Ước*. All hymns and choruses were taken from the Vietnamese Methodist *Thánh Ca* hymnal – specifically, *Thánh Ca tôn vinh Đức Chúa Trời*. This hymnal contains 250 songs and 42 responsive readings.

For both of the services, the chapel was furnished with an altar table which

⁴⁷ The normal weekly schedule of the church includes Sunday school from 10:00 to 10:30 a.m., Sunday morning worship from 10:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. and Sunday afternoon music practice from 12:00 to 1:00 p.m. Both services were commenced at approximately 10:00 a.m. Eastern Standard Time (EST).

was adorned with paraments. The pastor wore a black preaching robe and spoke from the pulpit using a microphone; the congregation sat in wooden pews. The altar table was furnished with standard accoutrements such as a cross, candles and offering plates. The room also featured stained-glass windows and its walls were decorated with two Christian banners. For the May service, one of the banners was green with a black cross and Easter lilies. Black letters on the banner spelled “He is Risen.” The other banner was tan with a gold cross and had red letters which spelled “Rejoice.” For the June service, one of the banners was red with a white dove and letters which spelled “Creator Spiritus.” The other banner was white with red flames and the black letters which spelled “Come, Holy Spirit, Come.” On the rear wall of the sanctuary was a symbol of a cross superimposed upon an outline of the shape of Vietnam.

The May 10th service occurred on Mothers’ Day; the June 7th service included a celebration of Holy Communion. Though these services obviously differed in particulars, the May 10th service exemplifies a typical service at *Hội Thánh Tin Lành Giám Lý* of Dayton (except for the “Mothers’ Moment”):

1. The pastor presents a greeting/welcome and announcements.
2. Led by the pastor, the congregation practiced singing *Vinh Quang Thuộc Chúa* (“To God Be the Glory”) in Vietnamese and English.
3. Led by the pastor, the congregation practices singing *Đi Với Chúa* (“Just a Closer Walk with Thee”) in Vietnamese and English.
4. Congregants greet one another.
5. The lay leader leads the congregation in singing *Vinh Quang Thuộc Về*

Chúa (“To God Be the Glory”) in Vietnamese and in English.

6. As a call to worship, the lay leader leads the congregation in a *Kinh Thánh* reading – Ê-sai 49: 13-15 (Isaiah 49: 13-15).
7. Congregants join in a brief period of silent congregational prayer followed by a pastoral prayer.
8. The pastor leads the congregation in praying the Lord’s Prayer.
9. The lay leader leads the congregation in singing *Đi Với Chúa* in Vietnamese and in English.
10. The lay leader leads the congregation in a responsive reading from the *Thánh Ca* - Responsive Reading #356.
11. The pastor presents a “Mother’s Moment” including prayer for mothers.
12. The lay leader prays an offertory prayer and the collection is received.
13. The congregation sings a doxology, *Tôn Vinh Chân Thần* (“Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow”).
14. The lay leader leads the congregation in an *Ôn Kinh Thánh* (“Bible review”).
15. The *Kinh Thánh* is read by lay leaders: *I Các Vua* (1 Kings 17) in Vietnamese and in English.
16. The pastor delivers her sermon, *Sống Trong Nghèo Kho* (“Living in Poverty”).
17. The lay leader leads the congregation in singing from the *Thánh Ca* – *Lòng Ước Mong* (“In His Time”) in Vietnamese (1 verse only).
18. Silent prayer is offered by the congregation.

19. A closing prayer is offered by the pastor.
20. The service is dismissed by the pastor with a benediction.

In all, twenty congregants had gathered in the small chapel-like worship space (not the main sanctuary) of a large church building. The service lasted approximately one hour and twenty-one minutes.

The June 7th service was similar but also included special music by a congregant and a celebration of the Lord's Supper. Songs included *Đau Thương Tiều Mất* or "Burdens Are Lifted at Calvary" and *Hãy Theo Ta* or "Yet Follow Me." The scripture reading was from Thi-thiên 136:1-4 (Psalm 136: 1-4). A lay leader led the congregation in an *Ôn Kinh Thánh* ("Bible review") and two congregants offered a *Kinh Thánh* reading from Mác 5: 25-34 (Mark 5: 25-34). The pastor's sermon was *Thái Độ Đối Với Đau Bệnh* or "Spiritual Desire." Finally, in this service the closing prayer was offered by a congregant.

At least by the time the benediction was spoken, a total of twenty-one congregants were in attendance. The service lasted about an hour and twelve minutes. In addition to the observation of these services, the pastor and certain congregants (identified here as Gia-co' and Giảng) were interviewed concerning the congregation's worship practices.⁴⁸

Prayer

From the information above, we can see that there are three standard "seasons" of prayer. First, the congregation offered silent prayer early in the

⁴⁸ Giảng is from a United Methodist background but Gia-co' has been impacted more by CMA influences. In fact, Gia-co' told me that he sometimes goes to an English-speaking CMA church in addition to attending the Vietnamese United Methodist Church.

service – either following the call to worship (as in the May service) or the opening hymn (as in the June service). The brief period of silent prayer was followed by a longer pastoral prayer. Afterwards, the congregation recited the Lord's Prayer. Second, short offertory prayers were prayed prior to receiving the collection. Third, the congregation either prayed silently or a lay member prayed near the close of each service – after which, the pastoral prayer/benediction was spoken.

In the May service, the pastor led the congregation in praying the Lord's Prayer following the first pastoral prayer. She also offered a prayer for the mothers at the close of her "Mothers' Moment." In the June service, the lay leader led the congregation in praying the Lord's Prayer following the first pastoral prayer. This service also included additional prayer associated with the performance of the *Tiệc Thánh* liturgy (specifically, the consecration of the elements). Regardless of which prayer was being offered or who was praying, the congregation always stood during the prayer and all prayers were offered in the Vietnamese language only.

In her interview, the pastor indicated the following as normal times for prayer: (1) the opening prayer, (2) before the offering, (3) after the sermon, and (4) at the close of the service. The pastor normally prays or leads prayer at those times. However, a lay person sometimes leads the congregation in offertory prayers and/or closing prayers. In general, the pastor described the purpose of prayer as being communication with God and said that it was used to ask God's blessing, forgiveness, guidance, and help in daily life. When asked to specifically

identify what she believed was happening during times of silent prayer, the pastor said that individuals will sometimes pray about issues of concern in their own lives or they may pray in response to the message of the sermon.

The pastor indicated that she would like to have more time in the service devoted to prayer (but some congregants have said services are already too long). She also opined that prayer, especially personal prayer, is probably somewhat neglected in the Vietnamese church (for instance, as compared with the Koreans who have a very strong prayer ethic). Gia-co' and Giảng indicated that they were unaware of any relationship between Vietnamese culture and the behaviors associated with prayer in their church.

Praise

An electric piano was used to accompany the congregational singing in both services. Songs were sung from the hymnals – or perhaps for some, from memory. In any case, no projection equipment was used during the service nor was there any accompaniment for the congregational singing other than the electric piano. The pastor indicated that normally there are no musical instruments used in the worship services other than the electronic keyboard. However, a portable Compact Disc player was used to provide accompaniment for the special music in the June service.

All hymns and choruses were taken from the Vietnamese *Thánh Ca* hymnal, *Thánh Ca tôn vinh Đức Chúa Trời*, created for the Vietnamese United

Methodist Church.⁴⁹ In each of these services, only two congregational songs were sung in both Vietnamese and English. All other songs, including the doxology and the special music, were in Vietnamese only. Pastor Dang indicated that some verses are sung in English for the sake of non-Vietnamese speakers and the younger generations who often have lower familiarity with the language. Though the services featured no examples of contemporary worship music sung by the congregation, the pastor mentioned that such songs are occasionally used in the services at Dayton. Congregational singing is alternatively led by the various members of the church's worship team.

According to the pastor, when special music is provided in the service it is almost always in Vietnamese. However, when the younger members are involved in presenting special music, it may include English lyrics. Infrequently, special music may be performed in the Vietnamese *vọng cổ* or *cải lương* styles. Such music is typically secular in origin. Thus the Vietnamese Christians often re-write the lyrics to imbue them with religious meaning. The special music provided in the June service was a contemporary Vietnamese Christian song (rather than "Christianized" traditional music of the *vọng cổ* and *cải lương* forms).

The pastor mentioned that the same doxology (*Tôn Vinh Chân Thần*) is used in every service. Also, the pastor will select a particular song to use for closing the service and use that same song for a few months at a time.⁵⁰ Most

⁴⁹ This is not the version of the *Thánh Ca* typically used in Vietnam. Pastor Dang mentioned that when significant numbers of Vietnamese began arriving in the United States, the various denominations selected songs from the version used in Vietnam (in some cases adding their own songs) in order to design new versions which would be more appropriate to their denominational needs.

⁵⁰ During the period of research at this church, the song used at the end of each service was *Lòng Ước Mong* or "In His Time."

other songs are typically selected based on the theme of the sermon and so choices may vary widely. But the pastor noted that there are certain themes in these songs that tend to recur. Such themes include “the cross,” “obedience,” “consecration” or “commitment,” “sharing the gospel” and “praising God.” Those these would be tied to the themes of the sermons, sermon themes seem to be more specific. For instance, the congregation may sing about God’s love but the sermon would most likely focus on some specific aspect of God’s love (forgiveness, providence, justice, etc.).

According to the pastor, a congregational favorite is *Lắng Nghe Tiếng Chúa*⁵¹ or “Listen to God’s Word.” The pastor did not specify a favorite but said that there many different songs that she enjoys. Gia-co’ and Giảng listed the following songs as favorites: *Ơn Lạ Lùng* (“Amazing Grace”) and *Bước Với Chúa Yêu Thương* (“Walk with Our Loving Father/God”) as favorites. He indicated that *Bước Với Chúa Yêu Thương* was written by a Vietnamese author. However, Gia-co’ and Giảng concur that most hymns are Western songs which have been translated. They noted that the church produced their own booklet of more modern worship music, primarily for the sake of the younger members of the congregation. Songs in this booklet are also western in origin but translated into Vietnamese language.

After explaining the difference between diatonic scales and pentatonic scales, Gia-co’ and Giảng expressed the opinion that neither they nor members of their congregation had any preference for songs which use a pentatonic scale.

⁵¹ In some books, this song is found under the title *Lắng Nghe Lời Chúa*. (The lyrics and music are the same.)

However, Giảng also said that when he sings traditional music (*cải lương* style), older people enjoy it much more than the younger members. Other than language and music style, Gia-co' and Giảng agree in their opinion that Vietnamese culture does not affect the way that music is used in their congregation's worship.

The pastor indicated that one of the congregation's needs is for more musicians. She did mention that Giảng has soundtracks to many songs and he occasionally plays them and sings along with them in church. The instruments used in the music on these soundtracks include a two-stringed instrument played with a bow (presumably, the *dàn nguyệt* or two-stringed lute) and a guitar.⁵² Pastor Dang also expressed the opinion that most songs do not reflect Vietnamese culture because they were written by westerners. Also, more contemporary songs have been translated into Vietnamese and written by Vietnamese lyricists. Songs which have been written by Vietnamese people are normally used for special music.

Confession of Sin

According to the pastor, no portion of each regular service is normally set aside specifically for confession of sin. She wishes there was more time in the service for such things but some in the church have complained about the service being too long as it is. However, such confessions are made during the services of Holy Communion. Also, the opportunity exists on a weekly basis for confession of personal sin during the part of the service devoted to silent prayer. Other opportunities exist on those occasions when the pastor selects a person to

⁵² The pastor did not know the name of the two-stringed instrument and was unsure as to whether or not the guitar had been modified to include a scalloped fret board.

lead the congregation in prayer at the close of a service. This would be particularly likely when the prayer is a response to a sermon on re-commitment to God or some other similar theme.

Though no baptism was observed, the confession of sin is to be presupposed during the celebration of baptism. The burial and resurrection signified in baptism shows that “the old life of sin is renounced and the new life of faith and obedience is begun” (Bromiley: 986). Likewise, the confession of sin is normally part of the service of Holy Communion as celebrated by this pastor. In addition to this, she indicated that she reads scripture verses such 1 Corinthians 11: 23-34 during Holy Communion. Verse 28 of that passage calls for a self-examination of the sort which could possibly prompt a spontaneous confession of sin.

Confession of Faith

Observations indicate that no specific time in the service was reserved for a confession of faith. However, confessions of faith are also a part of the celebration of baptism. The *United Methodist Hymnal* contains a liturgy for baptism but according to the pastor it is not used by most Vietnamese ministers. Instead they develop their own liturgy or do baptism “free-style.” This pastor indicated that she has never personally performed a baptism. Though she mentioned that CMA pastors do baptism only by immersion, she said that she would be comfortable performing baptism by either pouring or sprinkling or immersion. Gia-co’ said that (possibly because of CMA influence), older

Vietnamese tend to prefer baptism immersion while younger ones have no preference.

Yet in the celebration of baptism, the pastor indicated that a confession of faith would normally be a part of the liturgy. She said that every Christian should be baptized once in his or her life and that only a licensed or ordained minister may perform this action. Any believer may be baptized and children (including infants) may be baptized with the witness of parents/guardians who commit to guide them to faith. Such baptized children would then be eligible for confirmation later in life. Gia-co' and Giăng agreed that, in addition to adult believers, children can be baptized. They also mentioned that normally a period of instruction is a prerequisite to the baptism of an adult believer. These prerequisite elements define the action-field context of baptism.

Though the pastor has not performed a baptism, she shared some ideas with me about how she would do it when the occasion arises. Rather than using the liturgy provided in the *United Methodist Hymnal*, she would develop one using a scripture verse such as Romans 6: 28 (or some other such passage which refers to death and resurrection). She also thought of encouraging the person being baptized to receive a necklace with a cross. This cross could then be worn by the newly baptized Christian from that day forward to remind them of their baptism.

Reading of Scripture

The *Kinh Thánh* was read at least three times in each of the services observed: (1) the call to worship following the first hymn, (2) a responsive

reading following the second hymn, and (3) a pericope reading prior to the homily. When the call to worship is read, the entire congregation reads in unison. For the responsive reading, the lay leader reads alternatively with the congregation. For the pericope, the lay leader reads alone. The call to worship and responsive readings are read in the Vietnamese language only. The pericope was read prior to the homily in Vietnamese first, then in English.

Gia-co', Giảng and the pastor indicated that responsive readings are done every Sunday. In the May service, the pastor selected Responsive Reading #356. In the June service, Responsive Reading #236 was read. The texts associated with these responsive readings are located in the back of the hymnals and are selected by the pastor based on the sermon topic. The pastor indicated that in some Vietnamese Protestant churches (and in some English-speaking churches) responsive readings are not always taken from the *Kinh Thánh*. However, this congregation's practice is to use only readings from the Scriptures. She believes that Vietnamese culture is reflected in this preference for use of scripture above more personal expressions of faith. All *Kinh Thánh* readings were from a Vietnamese translation (the United Methodist version).

Preaching

The homily may be considered in some sense to provide the essential theme of these services. As previously mentioned, the theme of the sermon tends to determine the theme of the pre-sermon scripture reading. Frequently the songs sung in the service are related to the sermon's theme as well. Additionally, the sermon may also influence the content of the prayer offered at the close of the

service. The sermons given in the services observed were delivered entirely in the Vietnamese language. However, the pastor indicated that at least some explanatory comments are given in English if there are a significant number of non-Vietnamese speakers present.

Sermons preached during these services include *Sống Trong Nghèo Kho* or “Living in Poverty” (in the May service) and *Thái Độ Đối Với Đau Bệnh* or “Spiritual Desire” (in the June service). “Living in Poverty” was preached on Mothers’ Day and featured a woman of faith from the Old Testament, the widow whose son was raised from the dead as recorded in 1 Kings 17. Main points of the sermon are: (1) God called the widow to help the prophet just as he calls us to help others. (2) When the prophet first asked for bread, she resisted but finally gave it to him. (3) Her act of obedience led to three major blessings – financial help, healing for her son and the strengthening of her faith. (4) The blessings would not have happened without her obedience, and finally, (5) if we act in faith based on God’s promises, we can expect God to reward our faith, too.

In speaking about the giving of bread to one who is hungry, the pastor referred to a Vietnamese saying: “one piece while hungry is like a bag while full.” In regard to God’s faithfulness to provide when we act in faithful obedience, she referred to Matthew 6: 33 (“But first seek the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”) The pastor also pointed out that we should be willing to act in faithful obedience even when it costs us much or seems to be unreasonable.

In the June service, the sermon “Spiritual Desire” was primarily concerned

with what a properly spiritual attitude should be toward sickness. The sermon was taken from the story of the woman healed in Mark 5: 25-34. Important points of the sermon are: (1) The woman had a strong desire to be healed. (2) Her desire motivated her to act in faith – in spite of Jewish cultural constraints. (3) We each have spiritual sicknesses. (4) We ought to have strong desire to rid our selves of the sicknesses and respond in faith to be healed. (5) If you do not have this desire, God can give it to you.

In illustrating the inescapable nature of sickness, the pastor referred to a Vietnamese proverb, “birth, age, sickness, death” (describing the life cycle of every human being). She also mentioned her personal experiences with sickness and referred to Romans 8: 11 which speaks of the Spirit “quickening our mortal bodies.” Other references included Romans 7:18b-19 concerning the desire to do good and Philippians 2:13 which relates to God “working in us both to will and to do His good pleasure.”

The pastor said that no one besides her has delivered sermons in the church since she became pastor. But, like other United Methodist churches, lay speakers are allowed to preach at times and individual members may give testimonies in a service, too.

The pastor noted some favorite preaching themes such as: who we are (as the church), unity and love, family, the nature of God, new life (becoming a new creation), and being led by the Holy Spirit. She indicated that culture is not the central determinant of homily content; however, she also acknowledged that she commonly refers to elements of Vietnamese culture (sayings, people, stories etc.)

in her preaching. The pastor indicated she particularly may refer to certain Vietnamese proverbs or poems which speak to a wide variety of life issues (leaving home to be married, missing parents, raising children, etc.). These are important for the older generation in that they may not even be able to read and write but they know these sayings/poems well. Thus they would readily understand the point being illustrated by them. Also, she says that it makes them feel more “connected” to the message of the sermon.

The pastor gave a few examples of how she weaves cultural references into her preaching. For instance, she said that she might use the saying “the heart of the mother is like the ocean” (indicating deep and vast compassion). In a sermon, this “heart of the mother” might be compared to the heart of God – which, of course, has infinitely more compassion. In a different sort of sermon, she might refer to the tragic life of a famous Vietnamese singer in order to illustrate how fame and fortune can ultimately be empty and unsatisfying. Since the vast majority of Vietnamese would be familiar with this singer, they would easily recognize the truth of her point.

The Lord’s Supper

The sacrament of *Tiệc Thánh* (literally, “holy meal”) is normally celebrated on the first Sunday of every month. A liturgy for *Tiệc Thánh* is printed in the back of the Vietnamese version of the United Methodist hymnal but the pastor indicated that she and most other Vietnamese ministers do not use it. As with baptism, they prefer to develop their own liturgy or to celebrate the sacrament “free-style” (with no particular fixed order of readings/actions).

Individual cups of juice and individual wafers are used for the elements. The pastor mentioned that most Vietnamese who came to the U.S. as Christians are probably more comfortable with this form for the elements due to their experiences in the churches of Vietnam. Lay people are called upon to assist but generally they do not say or do anything – just hold the cup or wafers. The pastor, Gia-co’ and Giảng agreed that *Tiệc Thánh* is open to all who believe in Jesus as their Savior.

The pastor will share a short passage about the passion of the Christ (typically from 1 Corinthians 11: 23-34) and remarks related to Holy Communion. She might, for instance, remind them of God’s love, or how the Lord’s Table shows the unity of God’s people in coming as one to God and one another, the forgiveness of God, partaking of the elements as a testimony of Jesus to the world, or our acceptance as the people of God. She encourages people to receive *Tiệc Thánh* as often as it is available. The pastor always indicates that the bread and cup refer to the body and blood of Jesus, respectively. She believes the *Tiệc Thánh* is to remind us of the Lord’s death and provide us with an opportunity to renew our commitment to God. But she also said that *Tiệc Thánh* expresses thankfulness to God and demonstrates our responsibility to share the good news with others. Finally, she called *Tiệc Thánh* “a sort of mystery in which God sees our faith” when we participate and “grants blessing” through it.

Offertory Collections

Offertory collections are normally received weekly following the responsive reading and prior to the Bible review.⁵³ The normal sequence of events is as follows: (1) the collection is received by passing an offering plate, (2) the congregation stands and a doxology is sung, and (3) a prayer for the collection is offered. In both of the services which were observed, the keyboard played *Tận Hiến Cho Chúa* (“I Surrender All”) while the offering plate was being passed. In each case, the doxology was *Tôn Vinh Chân Thần* and a lay person prayed the offertory prayer.

The pastor believes that the purpose of the offering is both an expression of thankfulness to God but also a way of serving God – beyond merely taking care of the church’s necessities. She also said that some Vietnamese Christians see offerings (and particularly, tithing) as optional and that she believes that congregants often need to be reminded of its importance.

Occasional Services

One of the special services held on a regular basis in the Vietnamese United Methodist Church in Dayton is the service connected with the observation of *Tết* on the lunar New Year. The celebration of *Tết* tends to affect the songs that are sung during the service and perhaps, even the topic of the sermon or its illustrations.

⁵³ There are exceptions to this pattern. For instance, in the Mothers’ Day service, the responsive reading was followed by a “Mothers’ Moment” and a special song. In that service, the offertory collection was received after the special song. However, a review of church bulletins from these and other services demonstrated that the collection is normally received at this time.

Gia-co' and Giảng say that *Tết* may involve the decoration of the worship space in red and yellow colors and its adornment with small, fresh flowers.⁵⁴ However, since the congregation worships inside a church building that they do not own, they are hesitant to do much decorating. It is also common to give “good luck” money to the pastor. Gia-co' explained that this is another way to express thankfulness as well. After the service, there is normally a time for folks to gather for a meal and more celebration. It is fairly common to invite more Vietnamese folks (particularly, non-Christian friends and acquaintances) to the *Tết* service. Also, the church may opt for a joint celebration with another congregation (for instance, the Vietnamese congregation in Columbus).

The pastor mentioned that other special services include those associated with Easter, Christmas, and Thanksgiving (and to a lesser extent Mothers' Day and Fathers' Day). Obviously, these holidays impact the themes of the service. But the pastor tries to intentionally use these special times (including *Tết*) as opportunities to share Christ with non-believers rather than focusing ministry on the congregation's members. Yet she indicated that the celebration of *Tết* may be a time of reflection for Vietnamese Christians. They may reflect upon the previous year's events and upon how to live in the new year.

The pastor does not use a lectionary but she does try to choose themes/passages for her sermons which relate to the time of year. For instance, in preparing a sermon for *Tết*, she asserted that a theme such as “blessing” would be appropriate. Her pericope might be taken from Psalm 1.

⁵⁴ Gia-co' and Giảng indicated that the Vietnamese-American celebration of *Tết* pales in comparison with that seen in Vietnam. There it is customary for the people to buy new clothes (of the traditional style) and the festivities continue for days.

Thanksgiving is adopted from American culture and celebrated in much the same way as other American churches. However, instead of speaking about Columbus and the Pilgrims, sermons would address issues more focused on Vietnamese American experience (war, the sufferings of “boat people,” etc.) and thankfulness for God’s help. The pastor said that the Vietnamese church has also adopted Mothers’ Day and Fathers’ Day. These are widely recognized as times to focus attention on parents, grandparents and family.

Like other American churches, themes of the sermon at Easter (and thus hymns also) are oriented more toward the resurrection. According to Gia-co’ and Giảng, lilies may be used as decoration in these services as well. At Christmas, poinsettias may be used rather than lilies. Christmas songs will be sung, of course, and sermons will be more oriented toward events or themes related to the birth of Christ.

The Vietnamese United Methodist Church of Columbus

The history of *Hội Thánh Tin Lành Giám Lý* (“Vietnamese United Methodist Church” or literally, “Methodist Evangelical Church”) of Columbus, Ohio has much in common with the Dayton congregation. It was also founded by Reverend Paul Tran. He established the church about three years before forming the congregation in Dayton and pastored the church in Columbus for about 19 years. Tran was then replaced in November of 2008 by the same minister who was appointed to pastor the Dayton congregation, Reverend Esther Dang.

Also, the members of the Vietnamese United Methodist Church of Columbus (VUMC-C) participate in the ministry of the church in ways similar to

those of VUMC-D.⁵⁵ The Vietnamese United Methodist Church of Columbus was visited on May 10, 2009 and on June 7, 2009.⁵⁶ Like the services at the Dayton church, these services were mostly in the Vietnamese language. However, more English was used in the Mothers' Day service. Some verses of the hymns were sung in English; scripture reading (and prayer in the May service) was given in both English and Vietnamese. As with VUMC-D, all Vietnamese scripture readings were from the *Kinh Thánh Cựu Ước và Tân Ước*. Similarly, the hymns and choruses sung were taken from the *Thánh Ca* hymnal.

These services took place in the main sanctuary of the host church. The sanctuary was equipped with an altar table and pulpit. A cross, two candles and an offering plate rested on the altar table which was covered with a white cloth. A white lace cloth hung from the front of the pulpit as well. The pastor wore a black preaching robe and spoke from the pulpit while the congregation sat in wooden pews. A projection screen was used to communicate the order of service as well as *Kinh Thánh* readings, song lyrics and the Lord's Prayer. (Often the projections were in both Vietnamese and English.) The sanctuary was decorated with Christian banners. For the May service, one of the banners was white with a two doves underneath a cross superimposed upon a flower. A white banner at the back of the sanctuary displayed a United Methodist "cross and flame" and the words "Vietnamese United Methodist Church of Columbus, Ohio."

⁵⁵ For instance, through interactions with members of the local Vietnamese community in Columbus and distribution of Vietnamese Christian literature.

⁵⁶ The normal weekly schedule of the church is arranged in such a way as to allow the pastor to officiate all the Sunday schools and worship services of both services. The weekly schedule for the congregation in Columbus includes Sunday school from 2:30 to 3:00 p.m., Sunday morning worship from 3:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., and Sunday afternoon music practice from 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. Both services were commenced at approximately 3:00 p.m. EST.

As with the Dayton church, the May 10th service was held on Mothers' Day; the June 7th service was similar but included a celebration of the Lord's Supper. Though the services differed in particulars, the May 10th service exemplifies a typical service at *Hội Thánh Tin Lành Giám Lý* of Columbus (except for the Mothers' Day-related activities):

1. The pastor presents a greeting/welcome and announcements.
2. Congregants greet one another.
3. The lay leader leads the congregation in singing from the *Thánh Ca – Vinh Quang Thuộc Chúa* ("To God Be the Glory") in Vietnamese and in English.
4. As a call to worship, the lay leader leads the congregation in a *Kinh Thánh* reading – Ê-sai 49: 13-15 (Isaiah 49: 13-15).
5. Congregants join in a brief period of silent congregational prayer (about twenty seconds) followed by a pastoral prayer (about two and a half minutes).
6. The lay leader leads the congregation in praying the Lord's Prayer.
7. The lay leader leads the church in singing *Đi Với Chúa* in Vietnamese and English.
8. The lay leader leads the congregation in a responsive reading from the *Thánh Ca - Responsive Reading #356*.
9. A video was shown for the "Mother's Moment" at this church. The video was entitled or *Lòng Mẹ* or "Mother's Heart."
10. Mothers are called forward and each lady is given a rose by a young girl.

11. Four women from the congregation present a special song.
12. The lay leader introduces the offertory and the collection is received.
13. The congregation sings a doxology *Tôn Vinh Chân Thần* (“Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow”).
14. The pastor prays an offertory prayer.
15. The lay member leads the congregation in an *Ôn Kinh Thánh*.
16. The *Kinh Thánh* is read by lay leaders – *I Các Vua* (1 Kings 17) in Vietnamese and in English.
17. The pastor delivers her sermon *Sống Trong Nghèo Kho* (“Living in Poverty”).
18. The lay leader leads the congregation in singing from the *Thánh Ca – Lòng Ước Mong* (“In His Time”) in Vietnamese.
19. Silent prayer is offered by the congregation (about twenty seconds).
20. A closing prayer was offered by the pastor (almost four minutes).
21. The pastor dismisses the service with a benediction.

In all, twenty-two congregants had gathered in the sanctuary that Sunday. The service lasted approximately one hour and thirty-nine minutes.

The June 7th service was similar but also included a celebration of the Lord’s Supper. (The songs, readings and homily were the same as those used in the June service at Dayton.). By the end of the service, a total of nineteen congregants were in attendance. The service in its entirety lasted about an hour and eleven minutes. Following the observation of these services, the pastor and

certain church members (identified here as Ô-sê⁵⁷ and Ê-li-sa-bét⁵⁸) were interviewed concerning the worship of their congregation.

Prayer

As with the Dayton congregation, the observations of the Columbus worship services manifest a discernible pattern for prayer. First, the congregation offered silent prayer early in both services following the call to worship. The brief period of silent prayer (about twenty to thirty seconds) was followed by a longer pastoral prayer (two and a half to almost three minutes), followed by a congregational recitation of the Lord's Prayer. Second, short offertory prayers (a minute or less) were prayed after the collection. Third, the congregation either prayed silently (less than thirty seconds) or a lay member prayed (about two minutes) near the close of each service – after which, the pastoral prayer/benediction (up to nearly four minutes) was spoken. In the May service, about two and a half minutes of the pastor's four-minute closing prayer was in English.

⁵⁷ Ô-sê had only been a member of this congregation for about two weeks. Previously, he attended an English-speaking (Church of Christ) church in Indiana but before that a Vietnamese congregation in Minnesota. Ô-sê became a Christian when he was thirteen years old and still living in Vietnam. He was raised in a Christian family and came to the United States in 1986 at age eighteen.

⁵⁸ Ê-li-sa-bét has been a member of the Columbus church for about twenty years. Originally a Buddhist and raised in a Buddhist family, she became a Christian after coming to the United States. Like many Vietnamese, she had difficulties initially after entering the U.S. but she credits prayer as being the key to overcoming them.

Ê-li-sa-bét had a dream where she saw a figure that she somehow knew was Jesus. In the dream, Jesus called Ê-li-sa-bét to come to a meeting. As the dream continued, she went home and she was hungry but had nothing to eat. She said to herself, "Jesus called me to a meeting. Maybe I will have something to eat." However, she saw no table or food. Then Jesus gave her a paper plate but it was empty. When she received the plate from Him, he placed a single grain of rice on the plate – and immediately the plate was full of rice. Then Jesus said, "Stay here and meet the manager. I will come back." It was shortly after this dream that Ê-li-sa-bét met Paul Tran (the manager?), the founder of the Vietnamese Church in Columbus, and converted to Christianity.

In both services, a lay member led the congregation in praying the Lord's Prayer. Unlike the Dayton congregation, this congregation read the Lord's Prayer from a projection screen at the front of the sanctuary. The June service included additional prayer for the consecration of the communion elements. Like the Dayton congregation, the congregation always stood during prayer. In every case, prayers were offered in the Vietnamese language only except for the pastor's closing prayer in the May service.⁵⁹

The pastor indicated the following as normal times for prayer in the Columbus congregation's services: (1) the opening prayer, (2) before the offering, (3) after the sermon, and (4) at the close of the service. The pastor normally prays or leads the congregation in prayer on each of those occasions. At times, however, a lay person may lead the congregation in offertory prayers and/or closing prayers.

The pastor views prayer as a vehicle for communication to God, especially for asking God's blessing, forgiveness, guidance, and help. She believes that congregational members use these times of silent prayer to pray in response to the message of the sermon - or in some cases, they may pray about their own private issues. The pastor would like to see more time given to prayer in each service. However, ideas which would make the services longer tend to meet resistance since her services are already longer than those of her predecessor. Ô-sê believes that prayer is "our necessary communication with God." He sees it as an important time to talk with God about our needs but also a time to express thanks

⁵⁹ This may have been because some non-Vietnamese persons (besides myself) were present for the May service.

for his help in the past. Ê-li-sa-bét says that some Vietnamese people come to church primarily so that they can pray and ask for God's assistance. Both Ô-sê and Ê-li-sa-bét spoke of prayer as being like asking one's parents for help.

Praise

An electric piano was used to accompany congregational singing in both services. A guitar provided additional accompaniment on some songs. No other musical instruments were used in the worship services. The lyrics to the congregational songs were projected onto a screen at the front of the sanctuary. As with the Dayton congregation, all hymns were taken from the United Methodist *Thánh Ca*. In the May service, two congregational songs were sung in Vietnamese and English; the doxology and closing hymn were in Vietnamese only. In the June service, all of the congregational songs and special music were in Vietnamese only.

The special music presented in the May service was a western-style contemporary song. Ô-sê mentioned that the Columbus congregation had assembled a book of lyrics to contemporary praise songs for their use. He also expressed a personal preference for songs which relate to God's love and forgiveness. He specifically mentioned *Tập Tự Xưa* ("The Old Rugged Cross"), *Chốn Cao Hơn* ("Higher Ground"), and *Tôi Biết Đấng Nắm Tương Lai* ("I Know Who Holds Tomorrow"). Ê-li-sa-bét also mentioned some of her favorite songs: *Lời Chúa* ("Thy Word"), *Đi Với Giêsu* ("Walking with Jesus") and *Loan Tin Mừng* ("Pass it On").

Congregational singing is led by the various members of the church's

worship team. Occasionally, special music may be performed in the Vietnamese *vọng cổ* or *cải lương* styles with the (originally secular) lyrics modified to give them religious meaning. However, the special music in the June service was a Vietnamese contemporary-style Christian song rather than a song from one of the traditional Vietnamese styles.

The pastor said that the same doxology (*Tôn Vinh Chân Thần*) and closing song is used in the services of the Dayton and Columbus congregations.⁶⁰ Most other songs are usually chosen based on the sermon topic and so they may vary considerably. But since the same sermons are normally preached at both churches, themes that tend to recur in the worship songs are also the same (that is, “the cross,” “obedience,” “consecration” or “commitment,” “sharing the gospel” and “praising God”).

Ô-sê mentioned that he knew of some song lyrics that have been changed to adapt them to Vietnamese culture. For instance, most Americans are familiar with a hymn entitled “Bringing in the Sheaves.” But this is a meaningless phrase for many Vietnamese.⁶¹ For this reason, the Vietnamese version of the song has been changed to “Bringing in the Rice” (*Gánh Lúa Về*). Ô-sê indicated that this term connotes the concept of harvest much better. Not surprisingly, Ê-li-sa-bét expressed the opinion that the use of the Vietnamese language makes the songs seem more real and more intimate. The pastor added that the use of the Vietnamese language is a larger effect in terms of making the songs “speak to our

⁶⁰ The pastor selects a particular song to use at the closing of the service and uses that same song for a few months at a time. During the period of research at this church, the song used at the end of each service was *Lòng Ước Mong* or “In His Time.”

⁶¹ Sheaves are bundles of grain stalks. Since Vietnam does not grow any wheat, many Vietnamese have no familiarity with such a concept.

hearts stronger” than the effect of using a Vietnamese musical style.

Confession of Sin

The pastor indicated that a part of each regular service is not normally reserved specifically for confession of sin. However, the portion of the service devoted to silent prayer also offers the opportunity for confession of sin. They might also occur near the end of a service when the closing prayer is a response to a sermon. On a monthly basis, services of baptism and Holy Communion also provide such an opportunity.

Confession of Faith

Observations of the services did not indicate that a specific time in the service was reserved for a confession of faith. However, Ê-li-sa-bét mentioned that the Apostle’s Creed is sometimes recited in the worship services. Ô-sê agreed and said that the confessions gave him a sense of connection to the larger church. Confessions of faith are also involved in the celebration of baptism. Baptism symbolizes a person’s commitment to follow God. It represents a decision to die to one’s own life and live new life for Christ. Baptism is understood as a “means of grace” and Pastor Dang described it as a celebration of God’s love for us (shown in bringing us to salvation) and our acceptance of that love. Finally, it signifies the cleansing of a person’s heart so they can live for Christ.

As at the Dayton church, the baptism liturgy in the United Methodist hymnal is not used; instead, they prefer to develop their own liturgy or do baptism

“free-style.” (This pastor indicated that she has never personally performed a baptism.) Ê-li-sa-bét said that both adults and children may be baptized. However, pedo-baptism requires the witness of parents/guardians who commit to guide them to faith. When they are older, such children would then be eligible for confirmation after completing confirmation classes addressing topics such as God, the Bible, human beings, sin, and the Church. The pastor also teaches new believer classes to provide a period of similar instruction which is required prior to baptizing an adult believer.

Reading of Scripture

As might be expected, the *Kinh Thánh* readings are conducted in a way similar to those of the Dayton congregation. In each of the observed services, the *Kinh Thánh* was read at least three times. First, it was read as a call to worship following the first hymn. Second, another passage was read responsively after the second hymn. The last text (the pericope) is read just before the sermon is preached. When the call to worship is read, the entire congregation reads in unison. For the responsive reading, the lay leader reads alternatively with the congregation. For the reading prior to the homily, the lay leader alone reads the *Kinh Thánh*. The call to worship and responsive readings are read in the Vietnamese language only. The *Kinh Thánh* reading prior to the homily was read in Vietnamese first, then in English. Unlike the Dayton congregation, all *Kinh Thánh* readings were projected onto a screen at the front of the sanctuary.

The texts associated with responsive readings are selected by the pastor based on the sermon topic. Though some Vietnamese Protestant churches may

use responsive readings that are not always taken directly from the Bible, this pastor selects only readings from *Kinh Thánh*. As with the congregation in Dayton, all Bible readings are from the United Methodist version of the *Kinh Thánh Cựu Ước và Tân Ước*. Ê-li-sa-bét said that responsive readings are done every Sunday and help the people to learn more about the Bible. Ô-sê noted that the responsive readings are usually related in some way to the sermon and that they are always used in church services back in Vietnam. Other scripture readings are also related to the homily. For Ê-li-sa-bét, the various scripture readings in the service help to focus her mind on the topic of the sermon. Ô-sê believes that these readings are important because they illustrate that the pastor's sermon has a basis in the word of God rather than just her own thinking or imagination.

In addition, the congregation sets aside time for *Ôn Kinh Thánh* or "Bible Review." The *Kinh Thánh* review is question-and-answer format discussion of selected passages. The discussion does not necessarily relate to the sermon. This activity is not really a "reading of the Scriptures" - rather it is a guided *discussion* of the Scriptures.

Preaching

Predictably, the sermon topic tends to determine the theme of these services as in the Dayton church. The pre-sermon pericope reading, responsive readings, and the songs sung in the service are all connected to the sermon's theme. Additionally, the sermon may affect the focus and content of the prayer offered at the close of the service. The sermons given in the services observed

were delivered entirely in the Vietnamese language. On some occasions, however, at least some explanatory comments are given in English – for instance, when a significant number of non-Vietnamese speakers are present. The pastor’s sermon for the May service was *Sống Trong Nghèo Kho* or “Living in Poverty.” “Living in Poverty” was preached at the Mothers’ Day service and focused on the story of a widow whose son was raised from the dead. The important points of the sermon were the same as those listed for the Dayton service. Also, the pastor referred to a Vietnamese saying: “one piece while hungry is like a bag while full,” using the illustration in the same way as with the Dayton congregation. Ê-li-sa-bết indicated that she enjoys hearing stories about how God helps people to overcome challenges of this life and how the Scriptures can bring comfort to people. Ô-sê mentioned that commitment was a commonly heard theme of the pastor’s sermons. In the June service, she preached the sermon, *Thái Độ Đối Với Đau Bệnh* or “Spiritual Desire,” exegeting the Mark 5: 25-34 account of a woman Jesus had healed. Once again, the pastor made use of the Vietnamese proverb, “birth, age, sickness, death,” which outlines the stages of a human life. She also drew from her personal struggles and referred to the same passages from Romans and the Philippians that were used in Dayton.

The pastor mentioned that she commonly weaves elements of Vietnamese culture into her preaching in Columbus as she does in Dayton. The examples noted in the description of the preaching in that congregation apply in Columbus, too, of course (for example, “the heart of the mother is like the ocean”). Additionally, Ô-sê mentioned that the pastor will sometimes mention that the God

of the Christians is the same God that both ancient and contemporary Vietnamese peoples have known as *Ông Trời*.⁶²

The Lord's Supper

The sacrament of *Tiệc Thánh* (literally, “holy meal”) is normally celebrated on the first Sunday of every month. The “free-style” celebration of the sacrament is done using individual cups of juice and individual wafers for the elements.⁶³ As with the sister congregation in Dayton, lay people assist only by holding the cup or wafers. Again, the pastor noted that Holy Communion is open to all who believe in Jesus as their Savior.

The procedure followed, the use of scripture, and the meaning associated with the *Tiệc Thánh* is as described in the Dayton congregation. However, Ô-sê specifically said that the reason for participating in Holy Communion is to remind us of the Lord's death and the gift of the body and blood for us. Ê-li-sa-bét believes that celebration of Holy Communion is a celebration of God's love for us through the sacrifice of Christ.⁶⁴

⁶² The confusion about this arises from the fact that the *Kinh Thánh* almost always refers to God as *Đức Chúa Trời* (literally, “Noble Lord of Heaven”) or *Đức Giê-hô-va* (“Noble Jehovah”) rather than *Ông Trời* (“Mister Heaven”). Also, Jesus is specifically referred to as *Đức Chúa Jêsus* (“Noble Lord Jesus”).

⁶³ Ê-li-sa-bét mentioned to me that the previous pastor's practice was to use a whole loaf and a common cup for the sacrament of communion. This implies that the performance of *Tiệc Thánh* by intinction may be acceptable in these services as well.

⁶⁴ She also mentioned that there was a particular song (entitled “*Tiệc Thánh*”) that was commonly used.

Offertory Collections

Offertory collections are normally received weekly following the responsive reading and prior to the Bible review.⁶⁵ The normal sequence of events is the same as in Dayton: (1) the collection is received by passing an offering plate, (2) the congregation stands and a doxology is sung, and (3) a prayer for the collection is offered. The keyboard (partly accompanied by guitar in the June service) played *Tận Hiến Cho Chúa* (“I Surrender All”) while the offering plate was being passed. In each service, the doxology used was *Tôn Vinh Chân Thần* or “Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow.” The offertory prayers in Columbus were both prayed by the pastor.

Ô-sê sees giving as a response to the teaching of the *Kinh Thánh*. It is not a command of God - rather it is an expression of love to God. Ê-li-sa-bét said that giving is important to maintain the church - but that it is also a way of thanking God.

Occasional Services

The pastor indicated that special services are held on *Tết*, Easter, Christmas, and Thanksgiving. All of these services carry with them particular themes/emphases which have an impact on the songs that are sung during the service and perhaps, even the topic of the sermon or its illustrations. Ô-sê mentioned some specific songs that are commonly used in services associated

⁶⁵ As with the Dayton congregation, the Mothers’ Day service was an exception to this order. In the May service, the responsive reading was followed by a “Mothers’ Moment” and a special song. The offertory collection was then received following the special song. Nonetheless, a review of church bulletins from these and other services demonstrates that the collection is normally received between the responsive reading and the *Kinh Thánh* review.

with *Tết*. These songs include *Gánh Lúa Về* (or “Bringing in the Sheaves/Rice”) and *Mung Xuan* (“Greeting the Spring”).

The pastor and Ô-sê both mentioned that on special days, it is a common practice to invite more Vietnamese people and if possible, to share Christ with them. However, such times are also appropriately used by congregation members as opportunities to reflect on their lives, their relationships with God. Ê-li-sa-bét says that Easter and Christmas are the most important holidays and that more people come to church for those services. The pastor and Ô-sê understand Christmas as a time to rejoice in the birth of Jesus and agree that Easter is a celebration of the resurrection of Jesus. However, Ê-li-sa-bét relates Easter more generally to the idea of new life.⁶⁶ Ô-sê does not use the term “Easter,” preferring instead “Resurrection Sunday.” He believes that most people associate “Easter” with non-Christian ideas such as the “Easter bunny” and Easter eggs, resulting in a distortion of the day’s true meaning.

An Analysis of Vietnamese United Methodist Worship

The doctrinal standards of a given denomination provide a basis for discerning the proper meaning of worship behaviors practiced by that denomination. The doctrinal standards of the United Methodist Church are partly based on “The Articles of Religion of the Methodist Church,” (the “articles”) and

⁶⁶ Ê-li-sa-bét recalled the bleakness of her first winter in the United States. (In Vietnam, the trees are green throughout the year.) The deadness of the trees in that first winter was very depressing. Yet the coming of the spring with its budding trees and beautiful flowers was a wonderful picture of “new life” to her.

“The Confession of Faith of the Evangelical United Brethren Church” (the “confession”).⁶⁷

Both Vietnamese and non-Vietnamese churches in Ohio exhibit fairly diverse styles of worship. For example, English-speaking churches - even within the same denomination - may worship in markedly different ways (Book of Discipline: 70). Thus United Methodist worship practices may vary widely with respect to their musical styles, their preaching, their orders of worship - and they may differ in many other ways. Even so, certain commonalities can be identified and generalizations may be made about the worship of western-style churches in each denomination. These commonalities and generalizations allow us to discern how the practices of Vietnamese churches of a particular denomination differ from those of English-speaking churches of the same denomination. After discerning what practices are different, it must be determined whether that difference is appropriate. This involves, among other issues, whether the practice is logically consistent with a group’s overall theology.

The information provided earlier in this chapter identifies numerous examples of how worship practices have been contextualized in the Vietnamese Churches of Ohio. But how consistent are those practices with those of English-speaking churches in the same denomination? Is the meaning associated with each practice consistent with the associated denomination’s overall theology? In

⁶⁷ Additional bases for United Methodist doctrinal standards include the “standard” sermons of John Wesley and his other work, *The Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*. The “articles” and the “confession” may be found in *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House), pages 59-71. For Wesley’s standard sermons and *The Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*, see *The Works of John Wesley*, vols. 1-6 (Nashville: Abingdon Press).

the remainder of this chapter, these questions will be explored by comparing the Vietnamese churches' practices to those in its sister churches, identifying differences of form and meaning, and evaluating whether the meanings of each practice are contextually appropriate. First, an "appropriate" practice must be one in which influences from another religion or culture must not be mixed with Christianity to the point where Christianity loses its basic structure and identity.⁶⁸ Second, the worship expression must not be unavoidably offensive to Vietnamese persons. Finally, the worship practices must be compatible with at least one model of contextual theology. A good starting point is the identification of typical worship practices within each denomination being addressed.

United Methodist churches typically use a printed bulletin that indicates the church's order of service. A few of these congregations (approximately 29 percent) use PowerPoint or similar graphics at least once per month during their services.⁶⁹ In most of these churches (97 percent), congregants sing traditional hymns and use hymnals. About 88 percent of United Methodist churches use praise and worship choruses at least once per month as well. More than a third (about 35 percent) of these congregations may use Christian rock, pop, or country music and about 14 percent even use secular music. Certain worship practices are conducted at least monthly in an overwhelming majority of these United Methodist churches. For instance, roughly 94 percent of these churches reported

⁶⁸ In these cases, the basic structure and identity may vary slightly based on the beliefs of the particular denomination in question.

⁶⁹ These percentage statistics (and others in this paragraph) were taken from a study conducted by Ellison Research, a marketing research company located in Phoenix, Arizona. The sample of 659 ministers included only those who are actively leading churches. The study's total sample is accurate to within ± 3.7 percentage points at the 95% confidence level with a 50% response distribution.

that they “pass an offering plate/bag/basket” during their services. About 80 percent of the churches include congregational/responsive readings. Also, a majority of these congregations (92 percent) celebrate the Lord’s Supper at least monthly. United Methodist preachers deliver sermons which were reported as lasting, on average, only about 22 minutes. Theologically, the sermons are Wesleyan and Arminian. They tend to rely on the preacher’s understanding of the Scriptures as enlightened by tradition, reason and personal experience.⁷⁰

United Methodists recognize both baptism and Holy Communion as *sacraments*. They practice infant baptism and view both baptism and communion as “means of grace.” They do not re-baptize anyone who has received a Christian baptism.⁷¹ United Methodists see baptism as a sacrament which signifies death, rebirth, and new life; initiates the person into the Christian community; identifies the person as a Christian; and provides to those being baptized an assurance that God has forgiven their sins. While the procedures for both baptism and Holy Communion in United Methodist churches vary widely, guidelines for such services are provided in *The United Methodist Hymnal* and *The United Methodist Book of Worship* (see Appendix II).

Likewise, the order of worship used in United Methodism varies from one church to the next. However, it typically includes certain elements which are described in “The Basic Pattern of Worship” (Book of Worship, 13). Though specific “orders of worship” for both regular and occasional services are provided

⁷⁰ Scripture as a theological locus is still ranked above the tradition, reason and experience.

⁷¹ *The United Methodist Book of Worship* does contain a service (“Congregational Reaffirmation of the Baptismal Covenant”) in which previously baptized Christians “remember” their baptism.

in *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, United Methodist churches are not required to use only those forms.

The pastor of South Park United Methodist Church in Dayton, Ohio, Rev. Dr. Brooks Heck, said that his congregation follows this “four-fold” pattern of worship.⁷² At South Park United Methodist Church, a service of traditional worship is conducted in which the congregation sings from *The United Methodist Hymnal* and is accompanied by piano or organ. Often, the service features special music by soloists, the church’s Chancel Choir, and a Carillon Handbell Choir. The song “Shalom to You” is used to close each service. The traditional service uses songs like “What a Friend We Have in Jesus” and “Holy, Holy, Holy.” However, a more contemporary service is also conducted later each Sunday. In that service, a praise and worship team (with vocalists, acoustic guitar, electric guitar, drums and keyboard) leads the congregation in worship. Lyrics to the songs are displayed on a screen at the front of the sanctuary. Prominent worship symbols include the cross, candles, and a Bible – normally located on the sanctuary’s worship table.

A typical order of worship for the traditional service would include (1) greeting and announcements, (2) an opening voluntary, (3) an opening prayer or “call to worship,” (4) congregational singing, (5) a children’s sermon, (6) a Bible reading, (7) more congregational singing, (8) the sermon, (9) the offertory, (10) prayer, (11) Holy Communion or baptism, (12) a closing hymn, (13) a blessing on the people, and the singing of “Shalom to You.” Finally, (14) the service closes

⁷² South Park United Methodist Church in Dayton, Ohio is the church which hosts *Hội Thánh Tin Lành Giám Lý* (the Vietnamese United Methodist Church) of Dayton, Ohio.

with a passing of the peace. A typical traditional service lasts 60 minutes. The pastor estimates that 12-15 minutes of this time is normally devoted to the presentation of the sermon.

Contemporary services follow a different pattern: (1) The praise and worship team opens with instrumental music while the worship leader greets the people and presents announcements. (2) The team plays a meditative musical interlude, which is followed by (3) a children's lesson, (4) a Bible reading, and (5) the sermon and a prayer. (6) The ushers receive the offering while the praise and worship team plays. (7) The pastor responds to questions about the sermon,⁷³ (8) the pastor pronounces a blessing on the people and (9) the praise and worship team lead the congregation in a closing song. A typical contemporary service lasts about 45 minutes. Again, the pastor estimates his sermon consumes about 12-15 minutes of this time.

In both types of services, the music is related to the themes of the sermons. The sermons are preached from the *New Revised Standard Version* and *The Message*. The pastor designs his sermons to include a strong teaching component but always provides applications to his points. His intent is to help the congregants see themselves as "kingdom builders" and to encourage them to work to strengthen their relationship with God so that they can be effective as God's representatives in the world. Sermons are used to instruct the congregation

⁷³ In addition to displaying song lyrics, the projection screen at the front of the sanctuary displays announcements. It is also used to invite congregants to send text messages to the pastor while he is preaching if they have questions about the sermon. The pastor normally addresses these questions in the period following the offertory.

concerning Christian teaching and to remind them of the story of the gospel and of God's goodness to humankind.

The sacrament of Holy Communion is offered monthly. It is always given by intinction. On some occasions, the pastor uses services from *The United Methodist Hymnal*; other times, he informally talks through it. However, the pastor normally uses his own written liturgy for baptism. Scripture readings are normally done by the worship leader. But if the passage is from one of the gospels, the pastor will read. More than once a month, responsive readings from the hymnal may be used – but only in the traditional service. When these are used, the responses are sung and are accompanied by the church's organ. Such readings are seen as helpful in engaging the congregation in worship. Services may feature both confessions of sin and confessions of faith. No time is usually set aside for confession of sin during the service - although there are calls for an examination of conscience during Holy Communion which provide the occasion for such confessions. Also, orders of service for communion found in the *United Methodist Hymnal* provide specific prayers of confession.⁷⁴ Conversely, the services often include confessions of faith - usually in the form of creeds read from the *United Methodist Hymnal*. Again, orders of service for communion found in the hymnal provide specific creedal confessions which may be used during that sacrament.

During the offertory, the church's ushers gather in the rear of the sanctuary and move up the aisles toward the front. They distribute the offering

⁷⁴ The pastor is not opposed to the idea of altar calls as a time for confession of sin. However, he almost never uses them due to the age of his congregation.

plates and collect the money from each row until they reach the back of the sanctuary. Meanwhile, church members may place food items for the local pantry in a bin at the side of sanctuary.

The church commonly hosts occasional services such as Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday, Holy Thursday, Easter Sunday, and Christmas Eve. Ash Wednesday is a solemn, introspective service which features the imposition of ashes (symbolizing mortality and penitence) and normally, a service of Holy Communion. It inaugurates the season of prayer, fasting, and self-denial called Lent. On Palm Sunday, palm branches are distributed to members of the congregation in remembrance and celebration of the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. However, the celebratory nature of the occasion is tempered by reflections of the Christ's passion. Holy Thursday focuses intently on the final night that Jesus spent with his disciples. Themes may include the Last Supper or the prayers of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane.⁷⁵ Often, another church joins them for this service.⁷⁶ The Easter Sunday service is the most celebratory of all the services. It may include special music with brass instruments. The service celebrates the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and the believer's victory over death through the work of Christ.

Finally, the church hosts a special service each year on Christmas Eve. It particularly celebrates the birth of Jesus as an expression of God's love to humanity. The Christmas Eve service usually features special music which expresses themes connected with the celebration of Christmas. The

⁷⁵ This congregation does not host a Good Friday service.

⁷⁶ The congregation joins with this other church for its Good Friday service. Thus this church does not host a Good Friday service.

congregational singing consists largely of Christmas carols and the pastor’s sermon focuses on events related to the birth of Jesus.

The Length of Services in Vietnamese Methodist Churches

One important difference between the worship of the Vietnamese Methodist Churches and their non-Vietnamese counterparts is the length of their church services (see Table 3 below).⁷⁷ The average length of the Vietnamese services was over twenty minutes longer than the pastor’s estimate for a typical South Park service.

| Church | Length of observed services | Avg. length of services |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Dayton | 81; 72 | 75.5 |
| Columbus | 99; 71 | 85 |
| | | |
| <i>Average (all services)</i> | | 80.25 |

Table 3. Average length of observed Vietnamese services for United Methodist Churches of Ohio (in minutes).

Pastor Dang noted that worship services in Vietnam tend to be much longer than in the United States. She estimated that a typical Vietnamese service in the United States lasts about an hour and fifteen minutes to an hour and a half. Why is the length of the service important to the topic of contextualization? The

⁷⁷ At South Park United Methodist Church, for instance, the pastor estimated that an average traditional service is designed to last about an hour while a contemporary service averages only forty-five minutes. But the observed services in Dayton averaged 75.5 minutes and those in Columbus averaged 85 minutes.

simple answer is that cultural forces are affecting the preference for or against these services.⁷⁸

The most important factor in making the Vietnamese services longer is the time allotted for preaching in each service. At South Park United Methodist Church, the pastor estimates 12-15 minutes for each of his sermons. However, Dayton’s Vietnamese congregation heard sermons averaging 25.5 minutes (see Table 4 below) while the Columbus congregation heard sermons lasting an average of 22.5 minutes. This indicates that increased sermon length is often the cause of the longer services at the Vietnamese churches in Ohio. Yet the average time for these sermons (24 minutes) is very close to the average for other United Methodist churches in the United States (22 minutes).

| Church | Length of sermons | Avg. length of sermons |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| Dayton | 25; 26 | 25.5 |
| Columbus | 25; 20 | 22.5 |
| | | |
| <i>Average (all services)</i> | | 24 |

Table 4. Average length of sermons observed in the Vietnamese United Methodist Churches of Ohio (in minutes).

However, sermon length is not the only factor which extends the duration of services at the Vietnamese churches.⁷⁹ The Vietnamese pastor preached

⁷⁸ First, most Vietnamese Christians are used to much longer services in the churches of their former homeland. For example, CMA/ECVN church services in Vietnam frequently last an hour and a half to two hours – or even longer. Pastor Dang also suggested that the longer service reflects Vietnamese culture in the sense that they “have a less hurried approach to life.” Of course, the longer these Vietnamese Christians stay in the United States, the more they are affected by the western (“more hurried”) approach.

⁷⁹ It must be noted that the Vietnamese services observed on May 10th happened to be Mothers’ Day services. These services were longer than normal partly because of the inclusion of a special

sermons averaging about *ten* minutes longer than those at South Park United Methodist - but the Vietnamese services averaged almost *twenty* minutes longer than the English-language services at South Park. This is because the Viet services usually include an element that is never found in the English-language services at South Park - the *Ôn Kinh Thánh*.

The *Kinh Thánh* review is a “question-and-answer format” discussion of selected passages of scripture. Table 5 indicates the time devoted to *Ôn Kinh Thánh* in the United Methodist Churches of Ohio.

| Church | Length of <i>Ôn Kinh Thánh</i> | Avg. length of <i>Ôn Kinh Thánh</i> |
|----------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Dayton | 3; 4.8 | 3.7 |
| Columbus | 10.5; 5 | 8 |
| | | |
| <i>Average</i> | | 5.8 |

Table 5. Average Length of *Ôn Kinh Thánh* observed in the Vietnamese United Methodist Church services of Ohio (in minutes).

The *Ôn Kinh Thánh* primarily provides a means of education concerning the *Kinh Thánh*. Even a sermon presented in the appropriate language can be difficult to follow for those who have little background in the Bible’s culture and history. Thus, this time of learning is very helpful for those who are from a predominantly non-Christian culture.⁸⁰

Therefore, the longer services found in the Vietnamese churches may be partly explained by (1) longer sermons, and (2) the *Ôn Kinh Thánh*. Of course,

Mothers’ Day video, special music, and the distribution of flowers to the women of the congregation. However, even the other services observed were longer than the services at South Park United Methodist Church.

⁸⁰ The obvious exception would be those who grew up in a Middle Eastern (especially Jewish) culture. They might be more familiar with the stories of the Bible than many folks in predominantly Christian cultures.

the length of time allotted to each worship element (prayer, praise, etc.) is also a factor. Can we expect Vietnamese church services in the U.S. to continue to shorten in length in the coming years as the Vietnamese immigrants become more westernized? The answer is likely dependent on whether new Vietnamese immigrants continue to arrive in large numbers.⁸¹

Prayer

The importance that Pastor Dang places on prayer is suggested by (1) her desire to have more time in the service devoted to prayer and (2) her opinion that prayer is probably somewhat neglected in the Vietnamese church. The meaning she associates with prayer is “communication with God.”⁸² She sees it as useful in asking for forgiveness, guidance, and help in the daily struggles of life. This is similar to the idea expressed in *The United Methodist Book of Worship*: “Public prayer enables the community at worship to speak and listen effectively to God” (*Book of Worship*, 445).

The form of the prayer behaviors used in the Vietnamese United Methodist Churches is also consistent with *The United Methodist Book of Worship*. Prayers were offered by individual laity, or by the entire congregation, or by the pastor. Regardless of who was praying, the entire congregation stood during prayer. Finally, all prayers were in the Vietnamese language only.

⁸¹ If so, the predominant preference should continue to be for longer services. If not, we should expect the length of these services to gradually decrease to about what is normal for other U.S. churches of the same denomination.

⁸² It is always the practice of the Vietnamese United Methodist congregations to pray to God only. While Gia-co' and Giảng mentioned that they knew of some Vietnamese Christians (outside their congregation) who worship both God and parents, they indicated that such Christians had not been properly instructed.

Compare those attributes with the description of prayer in *The United Methodist Book of Worship*:

Persons may kneel, stand, or sit for prayer, with their eyes either open or closed. Prayers may be led by a layperson – a child, youth, or an older adult – or a pastor. Corporate prayer, however, should avoid lengthy discourses. Silent prayers, bidding prayers, and prayers of petition are excellent alternatives to the traditional pastoral prayer (*Book of Worship*, 445).

In most ways, the Vietnamese United Methodist churches seem to be tracking closely with standard denominational practice. Though pastoral prayers in some their services lasted nearly four minutes, the *Book of Worship*'s restriction on "lengthy discourses" is not sharply defined. Is a four-minute prayer a "lengthy" prayer? In a more meditative culture - which moves at a more deliberate pace, it probably is not.⁸³

Since the prayer practices do not differ significantly from those described in *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, it is reasonable to expect that the practices are appropriate with respect to form and meaning. But one of the theological pitfalls associated with prayer (and worship, in general) is the tendency to use it as a way to manipulate God – as with the practice of magic. Hiebert describes the difference between magical thinking and a more appropriate attitude toward prayer:

Magic is the opposite of Christianity. In magic, humans are in control. In Christianity they are called to submit unconditionally to God and his will. The difference between the two is *not* (emphasis added) in practice. It is in attitude. Magic is formulaic and mechanistic. Christianity is based on worship and relationships. Prayer is magic if supplicants believe they must say the right things in the right tone of voice accompanied by certain

⁸³ The Vietnamese Baptist church in Memphis allotted *more than a half hour* to prayer requests/prayer in one of their services.

right actions to be assured of right answers. It is worship when they kneel before God and cast their cares on him (Hiebert, 378).

So is the prayer of these Vietnamese Christians magical or worshipful? It may seem formulaic since the church prays at certain times, always stands when praying, and sometimes uses prayers with specific words (such as the Lord's Prayer). Yet there is little evidence that the prayer is mechanistic. The people stand out of a deep reverence for God – not because they believe they must do so to pray effectively. The pastor's depiction of prayer as "communication with God" indicates a sense of relationship. Thus the act of reverently standing is best understood as an act of authentic Christian worship.

Praise

The congregational singing in these churches is mostly from the *Thánh Ca*.⁸⁴ Thus, the music contains what amounts to a western hymnody – translated into the Vietnamese language. Though the conflict between the melodic movement in the hymns and the tonal aspects of the language has the potential to cause some confusion for the listener with respect to the meaning of a given lyric, anyone looking at the lyrics in a hymn book or on a projector screen will understand clearly what words are intended.⁸⁵

The most commonly sung hymn, *Tôn Vinh Chân Thần*, is a good example of a well-translated western doxology. The song contains a word (*thần*) which could be translated either "God" or "idol" – thus there is a possibility of confusion

⁸⁴ However, the Columbus congregation has assembled a song book which includes more contemporary music.

⁸⁵ They will understand clearly because they can read the diacritical marks (in the hymnals or on the screen) indicating the pitch contours of the words.

with respect meaning. However, the likely alternative (*Chúa*) could also be heard as “idol” - and its tonal contour conflicts with the movement of the melody. At any rate, it remains a song in which all in heaven and earth give praise to God. The song even retains its Trinitarian nature in praising God the Father (*Chúa Cha*), Son (*Con*), and Holy Ghost (*Thánh Linh*). Moreover, this Trinitarian emphasis provides context for interpreting the word (*thần*) correctly since the language reflects a Christian understanding of God’s nature.

One of the congregation’s favorite hymns is *Lắng Nghe Tiếng Chúa* or “Listen to God’s Word.” This song is unique among the other songs which surfaced in this study. It is the only song in the *Thánh Ca* that was written and composed by a Vietnamese person⁸⁶ rather than being translated from western music.⁸⁷ The lyrics are respectful in tone but urge the hearer to “listen to the Son” in the sense of obeying his words. His words are “life-strength” and “light.” His teaching offers hope, renewed life, and earthly happiness. These are important concerns for folks who have faced the hardships of war, the dangers of refugee life, and the challenge of beginning anew in a foreign country.

Several members of the Dayton congregation mentioned that one of their favorite songs was *On Lạ Lùng* or “Amazing Grace.” This song is a western favorite, too, of course – but its attraction to the Vietnamese listener may be partly related to the fact that its melody is constructed on a major pentatonic scale. The song also mentions God’s help in this earthly life. Yet it goes on to speak of

⁸⁶ The song’s music and lyrics are the work of Nguyễn Duy.

⁸⁷ The song’s verses are written in the key of A minor but it directly modulates to A major for the refrain. The fact that this song is favored by many Vietnamese congregants suggests that it is constructed in a way pleasing to the Vietnamese ear.

future heavenly joys as well.

One might argue that the Vietnamese hymn *Lắng Nghe Tiếng Chúa* is not explicit enough in that it does not mention Jesus by name. However, one would have to level the same charge at “Amazing Grace” and many other western hymns. Nevertheless, context determines to some extent the weight of such a charge. In a predominantly Christian context (such as the United States), the “son” would be understood to be Jesus; likewise, the “amazing grace” would be understood as the grace of God through Christ. Years ago in Vietnam, the “son” might have referred to an imperial figure (the “Son of Heaven”) but it seems less likely that this meaning would be taken in contemporary times. Therefore, such songs would be very appropriate for Christian worship – but perhaps less evangelistically useful than others which specifically refer to Jesus.

Congregational singing is typically accompanied by acoustic guitar and/or electric piano while special music often uses background tracks for accompaniment. The background tracks allow more traditional Vietnamese instrumentation and musical styles to be heard in the services. Again, the translation of a western hymn or other worship song requires some careful attention to maintain a faithful reflection the song’s expression of scriptural truth - and to a lesser degree, tradition. Thus even those practices which depart from the “recommendations” of *The United Methodist Book of Worship* do not contradict United Methodist theological conceptions – nor are they unnecessarily offensive to Vietnamese Christians. In the final analysis, the practice of praise among these Vietnamese believers is “appropriate” at least with respect to those elements of

our definition (lack of syncretism, lack of unnecessary offense to the congregants).

Confession of Sin

In these churches, sin is not normally confessed by corporate recitation of a formal prayer of confession (as one might find in the services of Holy Communion outlined in the *United Methodist Book of Worship*). When sins are confessed in public worship, it is primarily done during silent prayers or times of examinations of conscience. This reflects the Vietnamese preference for privacy in such matters. However, there are occasions - such as baptism - when a public confession of sin is given. Pastor Dang's use of Romans 6: 28 (which speaks of death and resurrection) indicates that a confession of sin would at least be implied in their baptismal practices - since it is sin that causes the death signified by the act of baptism.

Though the confession of sin might be emphasized more openly in some western churches, the oriental preference for avoiding shame provides an extra incentive to practice confession in this more private and less explicit way. The practice of testifying to God's goodness also provides an opportunity for *implicit* confessions of sin which may be very specific and very public. For instance, the congregant may speak of God's goodness in correcting him/her in some way (implying the person's confession of sin and repentance from that sin). Thus confessions of sin do happen. They can even be public and specific - though they often may not be very explicit.

Certainly, care should be taken to insure that congregants recognize that scripture encourages a certain level of openness among believers.⁸⁸ Yet even those practices which offer more privacy do not *preclude* public confessions and thus do not infringe on the basic integrity of Christianity as a belief system. At any rate, the inclusion of these opportunities for confession of sin during public worship (whenever they may take place) indicates the importance of such confessions as an integral part of a normal Christian life.

Confession of Faith

Though no specific time is necessarily set aside in every worship service for a confession of faith, there are occasions when such confessions are made. For instance, some lay members mentioned that the *Bài Tín-Diều Các Sứ-Dồ* (or the Apostle's Creed) is recited in some services. Like the English version, this creed affirms God the Father as creator of heaven and earth, Jesus Christ as his only Son (born of the Virgin Mary), Christ's suffering on the cross, his death and burial, his descent to the underworld and subsequent resurrection, his ascension to the right hand of the Father in heaven, and his return to judge the living and the dead. It also affirms belief in the Holy Spirit, the *phổ thông* (universal) church, the *sự cảm thông* ("sympathetic feeling") or communion of the saints, the forgiveness of sins, bodily resurrection and eternal life.

One might question whether *sự cảm thông* adequately expresses the full intended meaning of "communion" (originally from the Greek, κοινωνία) in the creed. However, the phrase does express the relationship between saints as

⁸⁸ For instance, a New Testament passage (James 5: 16) urges us to confess our faults to one another and pray for one another.

described in 1 Corinthians 12: 26. In that passage, the Scriptures assert that when one of the members of the church suffers, they all suffer. It is also worth noting that the word “catholic” is replaced by the term *phở thông*. In this case, *phở thông* may actually be clearer than its counterpart in English. The word “catholic” is easily confused with “Catholic” which often has troubling connotations in Protestant circles. However, the term *phở thông* is not likely to be confused with the Vietnamese word for Roman Catholic (*Công Giáo*).

The pastor also indicated that confessions of faith would always be included in any baptismal services she might officiate. Though many older Vietnamese prefer baptism by immersion, this pastor’s practice would offer additional options (that is, to baptize by sprinkling or pouring as well as immersion). Infant baptism is also practiced with confirmation occurring at some later date; re-baptism would not be permitted. In all these ways, the baptismal practices of the Vietnamese United Methodist churches in Ohio are consistent with United Methodist practice (*Book of Worship*: 81-84).

The *meaning* of baptism is also consistent with that of other United Methodists. Pastor Dang described baptism as a means of grace which symbolizes a person’s commitment to follow God and the “cleansing of the person’s heart to live a new life for Christ.” This harmonizes well with the concept of baptism outlined in the *Book of Worship*. The section which refers to the baptismal covenant describes the sacrament as celebrating both the act of personal commitment and the grace that enabled one to perform that act. With

infant baptism, the sacrament “anticipates that act, declares its necessity, and celebrates the grace that will make it possible” (*Book of Worship*: 81, 82).

In consideration of these points, it is reasonable to say that both the creed and the baptismal practices are free of syncretism. The translation of the creed and other attributes of the confession of faith clearly lack syncretism and no language has been found which would be likely to offend Vietnamese sensibilities.⁸⁹

Reading of Scripture

In each of the Vietnamese United Methodist churches, the *Kinh Thánh* is typically read each week (1) as a call to worship following the first hymn, (2) responsively after the second hymn, and (3) prior to the preaching of the sermon. On the first two occasions, the scripture is read in the Vietnamese language only. Most likely, this is because the entire congregation is reading. When the pericope is read prior to the homily, it is given in Vietnamese first, then in English. At any rate, the Vietnamese United Methodists in Ohio tend to read the Scriptures at least as frequently as their English-speaking counterparts. At South Park United Methodist Church, the Scriptures are normally read each week prior to the sermon and responsive reading may occur more than once per month (in the traditional service only).

In the Vietnamese churches, passages are read from a traditional Cadman translation of the *Kinh Thánh Cựu Ước và Tân Ước*. Therefore, these readings

⁸⁹ Arguably, the Vietnamese version of the Apostle’s Creed is actually clearer than the English version since it does not use a term which might be mistaken as referring to the Roman Catholic Church.

may unfortunately contain some archaic language with which many Vietnamese are unfamiliar. However, this can be problematic in that much of the importance of using the *Kinh Thánh* in the service is to educate those who may not be well acquainted with Christian teachings. In English-speaking churches, it is often suggested that more contemporary versions of the Bible be used in lieu of the King James Version since the newer versions are more easily understood by contemporary readers. It could be argued that growing up in the United States provides an advantage to understanding a version of the Bible which uses unfamiliar words because the culture itself is more “Christianized.” For those from less “Christianized” contexts, the importance of clarity in Bible translation is arguably even more important. In addition to these readings, the congregations’ practice of *Ôn Kinh Thánh* underscores this educational focus. Unfortunately, until more contemporary translations become widely available, the use of older translations may be necessary. Thus the Vietnamese churches’ practice of *Kinh Thánh* reading has neither syncretistic content nor language which would unnecessarily offend Vietnamese congregants.

Preaching

The pastor manifests a clear tendency to use elements of Vietnamese culture in her proclamation of the gospel. Her intent is to use these elements in such a way as to illustrate scriptural teaching more clearly and in terms that connect with those in her congregation. For instance, in the sermon *Thái Độ Đối Với Đau Bệnh*, the pastor made use of the Vietnamese saying, “birth, age, sickness, death,” which speaks of the stages of a human life. But she was careful to use the

saying in a way which is consistent with Christian teaching. For instance, she does not suggest that this proverb teaches that there is no afterlife. Instead, she uses it to illustrate the universal recognition of the fact that all human beings struggle with the problem of sickness. But her *evaluation* of the various human approaches to sickness is based on exegesis of the Scriptures. Thus cultural elements are not used as *loci theologici* but simply as illustrations of the common experiences of humans which should impel us to seek answers in the *Kinh Thánh*.

This desire to focus on the Scriptures partly explains the importance of the *Kinh Thánh* review. But its full importance arises from the nature of Vietnamese culture - and to an important extent, the nature of God. Because of God's ineffability, theological discourse necessarily relies on analogical language. Thus, another significant aspect of the preaching is its use of analogies. It is good practice to clarify that a certain proverb does not *exactly* illustrate a particular truth but rather it is *analogous* to it. It is always a good idea to specify *in what way* the analogy does or does not apply. For instance, the saying "the heart of the mother is like the ocean" illustrates a deep and vast capacity for kindness and compassion. However, even the ocean has a finite volume yet God's compassion is boundless. Thus, if the "heart of the mother" is compared to the "heart of God," it must be understood that the comparison is not exact. Of course, when people hear a proverb they usually realize that the language is metaphorical or analogous. Still, it is possible to mistake *the particular way or ways* in which the analogy applies. This is perhaps less important when illustrating an inescapable human experience (such as sickness) than when illustrating a less

obvious truth of the Scriptures – especially, to *receptors* who are unfamiliar with the historical/cultural context of the *source*.⁹⁰ In the first case, the points of applicability are easier to discern since they connect with the human experiences of their own lives; in the second case, they may only be discerned through understanding the lives of those from another time and place (that is, the ancient near east). In some cases, they may best be understood through direct personal experience. For instance, the pastor will sometimes mention that the God worshipped by Christians is the same God that Vietnamese peoples have historically known as *Ông Trời*. However, many Vietnamese beliefs about *Ông Trời* are not necessarily consistent Christian teaching.⁹¹ The pastor uses an approach similar to that of Paul at Areopagus when speaking to worshippers at the altar of the “unknown God.” She declares to them the *Ông Trời* that they “ignorantly worship” (Acts 17: 23), using the Scriptures to indicate where the analogy fits – and where it does not. The Bible review is a *discussion* which provides an opportunity to clarify matters such as this.

In *Sống Trong Nghèo Kho*, Pastor Dang quotes the Vietnamese proverb, “one piece while hungry is like a bag when full” when talking about the widow’s gift of her last morsels of food (1 Kings 17). She does this to indicate the sacrificial nature of the gift – though the gift was small. This evaluation of the significance of the widow’s gift is not explicitly developed in that Old Testament passage – yet it is not a departure from the teaching of scripture in general. Indeed, her proverb echoes Jesus’ point concerning another widow who gave a

⁹⁰ In this case, I am referring to each writer of the Scriptures as a *source*.

⁹¹ Beliefs concerning *Ông Trời* which are inconsistent with Christian teaching include, for example, his relationship with house gods and the practice of the cult of the emperor.

small offering at the temple. He said that her pittance was “more” than that of the rich because they gave out of their abundance (Mark 12: 41-44).

The sermons present no evidence of syncretism/unnecessarily offensive content. Thus, the preaching also meets our initial requirements for appropriate contextualization.

The Lord’s Supper

The liturgy provided in the *United Methodist Hymnal* is not used; yet the behaviors observed are the same as those in many English-speaking United Methodist churches. The worship acts are consistent with the guidelines of the *United Methodist Book of Worship* (Book of Worship: 28).⁹² But what meanings do the congregants associate with the sacrament? As in other United Methodist churches, the service of *Tiệc Thánh* is a celebration of God’s love for us and a reminder of the Lord’s death on the cross. The pastor communicates this during the service by the use of scripture (typically, 1 Corinthians 11: 23-34) and by adding her own comments. Those comments expand the meaning to encompass concepts such as the unity of God’s people in meeting at the table, the forgiveness of God, and partaking of the elements as a witness of faith in Christ. These notions of the sacrament are consistent with those expressed in the *United Methodist Book of Worship* (Book of Worship: 28) and various passages of scripture.⁹³

⁹² The bread may be leavened or unleavened; it may be whole, wafers, or other pieces. The juice must be unfermented grape juice or its equivalent; it may be served either in a common cup or in individual cups.

⁹³ For Communion as a symbol of God’s forgiveness through the cross, see Ephesians 4: 7 and Colossians 1:14. For Communion as a testimony to Christian faith, see 1Corinthians 11: 24-25.

Just as the *United Methodist Book of Worship* allows a time of confession and silent prayer (Book of Worship: 35), the pastor believes the celebration of *Tiệc Thánh* provides each congregant with an opportunity to renew his or her commitment to God. Also, her view of *Tiệc Thánh* as an expression of thankfulness to God is consistent with the sentiments of the “Great Thanksgiving” in the United Methodist liturgy (Book of Worship: 36-38). Finally, Pastor Dang refers to *Tiệc Thánh* as a sacrament in which God responds to our faith and “grants blessing” during the celebration of it. Thus the sacrament qualifies as what John Wesley would call a “means of grace.”

Offertory Collections

Offertory collections are normally received in much the same way that one might expect them to be received in other United Methodist churches: The collection is received by passing an offering plate; the congregation stands and a doxology is sung; a prayer for the collection is returned by either the pastor or a lay person. This is very similar to the way it is done in South Park United Methodist Church’s traditional service. The *United Methodist Book of Worship* describes the offering as a time to give such gifts to God and suggests the use of doxologies (Book of Worship, 26-27). The English version of the doxology⁹⁴ used by Pastor Dang’s congregation is recommended for that use (Book of Worship, 19). But once again, we must investigate the meanings behind those actions.

⁹⁴ The doxology used was *Tôn Vinh Chân Thần* or “Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow.”

The “articles” and the “confession” are silent with respect to the meaning of the offering. While the *United Methodist Book of Worship* does not address the motivations or meanings behind the offertory, its inclusion in the second movement of the service (“Proclamation and Response”) implies that the offering is at least partly a response to the Word of God. Ô-sê specifically mentioned that giving to the church was a response to the teaching of the Scriptures – though he also understands it as simply an expression of love to God. The pastor and Ê-li-sa-bét viewed offerings more instrumentally, stressing their importance for maintenance of the church. She added that for some people it is way of giving thanks to God. Since the Scriptures instruct us to give thanks and serve God, these meanings are consistent with the idea of the offertory as a response to God’s word.

Occasional Services

South Park United Methodist Church’s English-speaking congregation has certain occasional services which are not celebrated in the Vietnamese churches of Ohio (that is, Ash Wednesday and Holy Thursday). Conversely, the Vietnamese churches celebrate *Tết*, the Vietnamese New Year. The English-speaking congregation, predictably, does not celebrate *Tết* since it is not part of mainstream American culture.

During the celebration of *Tết* the theme/emphasis in the Vietnamese congregation centers around a review of the previous year and reflection on how to live in the coming year. Songs which reflect this emphasis, such as *Mừng Xuân* (“Greeting the Spring”) are often used during *Tết*. Amid images of crimson

flowers and green leaves, this song celebrates spring as a gift from the Lord and as a manifestation of God's love for us. It encourages us to be "glad to our Lord" because of spring's arrival. The second verse speaks of praising "the Father" for the old year and asking God's "blessed grace" in the new year. The final verse wishes joy and blessing to others in the coming year. This emphasis usually impacts the focus of the sermon as well. However, because services tend to have a greater number of visitors from the Vietnamese community, the intent of the sermon is also likely to be aimed at leading unbelievers to saving faith in Christ. Thus the celebration of *Tết* is in some sense analogous to a "revival season."⁹⁵ Songs which reflect this evangelistic emphasis such as *Gánh Lúa Về* (or "Bringing in the Rice") are also associated with *Tết*. At any rate, the themes of these sermons and songs are not theologically inconsistent with Christian belief or United Methodist practice.

The Vietnamese churches in Ohio (like many other United Methodist churches) also celebrate special Thanksgiving-related services. Though this practice was adopted from American culture, its manner of celebration is more oriented toward Vietnamese life experiences and situations. In the Vietnamese United Methodist churches, the decorations, songs and sermons tend to avoid themes related to the early settlement of the United States (Pilgrims, the Mayflower, etc.). Instead, their celebration of Thanksgiving centers on acknowledging God's help in more recent times of adversity (for example, war, danger on the high seas, getting established in a new country, etc.). Nevertheless,

⁹⁵ Some United Methodist churches have revival at about the same time each year (for instance, in the fall).

the celebration retains its central theme of thanksgiving to God and remains free of syncretism.

The Vietnamese church also celebrates Mothers' Day and Fathers' Day. These days are celebrated to a greater or lesser degree in other United Methodist churches but they may have greater importance in the Vietnamese churches. These are special occasions to be thankful for parents and for family in general. Such celebrations are expressions of the scriptural mandate to "honor thy father and mother" (Exodus 20: 12, Matthew 15: 4, *et al*).

Finally, both types of churches have special services on Easter Sunday and during the season of Christmas. The Vietnamese Easter Sunday services are very much like those at other United Methodist churches - except for the use of the Vietnamese language, of course. The decoration of the church (for instance, the use of Easter lilies) is not unlike the decoration of many Protestant churches in that season. More importantly, the meaning of the celebration of Easter is clearly manifest in the sermons, scriptures, and songs which focus on the resurrection of Christ. The same can be said of the Christmas services. Poinsettias adorn the sanctuary and traditional western Christmas songs are sung in Vietnamese. Sermons address events or themes related to the birth of Christ. Thus the practices associated with occasional services as well as the other practices surveyed in this chapter are well contextualized with respect to the question of syncretism and the avoidance of offense to Vietnamese congregants.

CHAPTER 4

THE VIETNAMESE BAPTIST CHURCHES OF KENTUCKY AND TENNESSEE

Vietnamese Baptist Churches were found in the cities of Louisville, Kentucky, Bowling Green, Kentucky, and Memphis, Tennessee. The churches in both Kentucky cities are Baptist congregations and the two churches share a single pastor. The pastor began his ministry in Louisville by founding the *Hội Thánh Báp Tít Việt Nam* (Vietnamese Baptist Church) in 1998. Later, in 1999, he was invited by Pat Guiterrez, International Ministries Coordinator at the First Baptist Church in Bowling Green, to form a congregation for Vietnamese people in Bowling Green. The Louisville church meets in its own building; the Bowling Green congregation meets in a Sunday school room of that First Baptist Church.

Pastor Luc was raised in a Zen Buddhist family in Vietnam. However, his older sister converted to Christianity and soon he began to take notice of the change in her life. She began to witness to him and he began to attend church. In 1954, when he was about eleven years old, he became a Christian. Over the course of years, his entire immediate family converted to Christianity.⁹⁶ While in Vietnam, his spiritual formation as a Christian was primarily a result CMA influences. Those influences and the education he has received since that time are the main factors impacting his approach to ministry. The pastor holds a Master of

⁹⁶ The pastor's wife was also from a Buddhist family. When she was a teenager, a British missionary was teaching English in her high school in Vietnam using the Bible as her text. She (the pastor's wife) converted to Christianity shortly after her graduation and was baptized in 1962.

Arts in Sociology and more recently has completed a Master of Divinity degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville.

The pastor asserts that ministry to Vietnamese people emphasizes teaching because most Vietnamese are of Buddhist background and do not have much knowledge of the Bible. For instance, more teaching is necessary concerning worship of idols and ancestors. When non-Vietnamese people are present in the service, the pastor attempts to offer at least some brief explanations of parts of the sermon in English.

The First Vietnamese Baptist Church in Louisville

At the *Hội Thánh Báp Tít Việt Nam* (First Vietnamese Baptist Church) of Louisville, the services were mostly delivered in the Vietnamese language. The hymns were primarily sung in Vietnamese; however, some verses were sung in English. For both of the services, the pastor wore a suit (no robe) and spoke from the pulpit using a microphone while the congregation mostly sat in wooden pews. The chapel was furnished with a small table in front of the pulpit. The small table supported an open Bible and two offering plates. For the May service only, the table held the communion trays as well. A gold cross hung on the wall at the front of the sanctuary with a candle ensconced on each side and slightly below it. A large display of flowers was underneath the cross. Above the cross, *Tôn Vinh Đức Chúa Trời* (“Glory to the Noble Lord of Heaven”) was spelled out in large gold letters. The front of the sanctuary also had a projector screen which was pulled down during the song service (and retracted when the congregation was not

singing). At the rear the sanctuary was a wooden cross superimposed upon an outline of the shape of Vietnam.

Visits were made to *Hội Thánh Báp Tít Việt Nam* on May 17, 2009 and again on June 21, 2009.⁹⁷ An outline of the May 17th service follows:

1. The congregation sings – *Hô-sa-na* (“Hosanna”) in Vietnamese only.
2. The congregation sings – *Hướng Lên Chúa* (“Unto Thee, O Lord”) in Vietnamese only.
3. The congregation sings – *Jê-sus Là Bạn Thật* (“What a Friend We Have in Jesus”) in Vietnamese only.
4. A lay member presents a greeting/welcome and announcements.
5. The pastor introduces me and invites me to lead the congregation in the opening prayer.
6. I lead the congregation in prayer in English while the pastor translates phrase by phrase into Vietnamese.
7. A lay member leads the congregation in a responsive reading from the *Thánh Ca* - Responsive Reading # 48.
8. The lay leader prays an offertory prayer and the collection is received.
9. The *Kinh Thánh* is read by lay leaders – *Thi-Thien 16: 1-11* (Psalm 16: 1-11) in Vietnamese and in English.
10. The pastor offers a brief prayer and delivers his sermon *Con Đường Sự Sống* (“The Path of Life”) primarily in Vietnamese but interspersed with short summaries of each point in English.

⁹⁷ The normal weekly schedule of the *Hội Thánh Báp Tít Việt Nam* includes Sunday school from 10:00 to 10:45 a.m. and Sunday morning worship from 11:00 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. On both visits, services began at about 11:00 a.m. EST.

11. A prayer was offered by the pastor and then a lay member.
12. The pastor leads the congregation in singing a doxology, *Tôn Vinh Chân Thần* (“Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow”), and
13. The pastor dismisses the service with a benediction.

The service lasted approximately one hour and six minutes. In all, twenty-three congregants participated in worship that morning.

The June 21st service was very much like the May service with the following exceptions: (1) The opening song was *Lòng Ước Mong*. (2) Congregants greeted one another following the opening prayer. (3) The scripture reading was *Lu-ca 15: 11-32* (Luke 15:11-32). (4) Because this was a Fathers’ Day service, the fathers present were called to the front of the sanctuary and each was given a pin with a cross on it. Following this, the pastor and congregation prayed for the fathers. The pastor was also presented with a gift from the congregation. (5) The pastor’s sermon was *Mất Mà Tìm Lại Được* (“If You Fail, You Can Come Home Again”) – given primarily in Vietnamese but including brief summaries of each point in English. (6) A prayer was offered by the pastor and a lay member, followed by an invitation to receive Christ. A young lady responded to the altar call. (7) The pastor led the congregation in singing *Phục Hưng Tâm Hồn* (“Alleluia, Thine the Glory”) in Vietnamese only and, (8) the pastor’s closing prayer including thanksgiving for the salvation of the young lady. This worship service lasted about one hour and twenty-three minutes. Thirty-six worshippers participated in the service that morning. In addition to observing these services, the pastor and three other church members (who we will refer to as

Mác, Ru-to and Ê-xơ-tê) were interviewed concerning the worship practices at this church.

Prayer

The pattern of prayer is illustrated as follows: First, the pastor invited me to pray the opening prayer in each service following the greeting and announcements. In each case, the pastor translated my prayer (phrase by phrase) from English to the Vietnamese language. Second, the lay leader prayed an offertory prayer prior to receiving the collection. Third, pastoral prayers were offered before/after the homily in each service. Fourth, the pastor dismissed both services with benedictions.

In the Fathers' Day service, the pastor also led the congregation in praying for the fathers who were present. He also prayed a salvation prayer with a young lady who received Christ and added a prayer of thanksgiving for her salvation. Regardless of which prayer was being offered or who was praying, the congregation always stood during the opening and closing prayers.⁹⁸ The lone exception is that when the pastor prayed before/after his sermon, the congregation stood in the first service only.

The opening prayers (offered by the pastor and me) were in Vietnamese and English. The pastor's were also in Vietnamese and English. However, all prayers offered by lay members were in the Vietnamese language only. Finally, whenever the congregation was led in prayer (by either pastor or a lay member), the prayer concluded with the congregation and leader praying in unison "*nhân danh Đức*

⁹⁸ When the girl was praying her prayer of salvation with the pastor, the congregation stood as well.

Chúa Jêsus-Christ, A-men” (“In the name of the Noble Lord Jesus Christ, Amen”).

Praise

In the May service, recorded background tracks were the only accompaniment for the congregational singing. However, in the June service, a piano was used for accompaniment. In most cases, projection equipment was used to provide lyrics to the songs – though hymnals were available in the pews. The exceptions were the closing songs in each service, *Phục Hưng Tâm Hồn* (“Alleluia, Thine the Glory”) and *Tôn Vinh Chân Thần* (“Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow”). Both of these songs were sung *a cappella* and without the use of either the projector screen or hymnals. However, many hymns and choruses were taken from the Vietnamese *Thánh Ca* hymnal created for the Vietnamese Baptist churches. All songs, including the doxology, were sung in Vietnamese only.

The pastor said that even though the congregation sings songs from sources other than the *Thánh Ca*, he prefers songs from the hymn books. Recently, the congregation has been moving away from songs in the hymnal and incorporating more contemporary praise and worship songs. Mác prefers these newer songs such *Khát Kao Dòng Nước* (“As the Deer”) to those in the hymnals. Ru-tơ says that both the *Thánh Ca* and other songs are used but newer songs are not used in every service. Normally, piano and recorded background tracks are the only accompaniment during song services. However, guitar, drums, and even violin have been used on some occasions.

According to Ru-tơ, individuals in the congregation present special music

(solos, sometimes duets or quartets) usually on holidays, mainly in Vietnamese and rarely in English. Mác mentioned that the special music tends to be more westernized in style. Yet traditional styles such as *cải lương* have also been used from time to time as well. *Phiero Chối Chúa* is one example of a *cải lương*-style song which has been sung by a lay member as special music in their services.

Mác said worship and praise are typical themes for the newer congregational songs. He sees this music as being very important drawing the congregation into a more intimate relationship with God. Favorites mentioned by the other interviewees mostly came from the *Thánh Ca*. For instance, Ê-xơ-tê likes *Thánh Chúa Siêu Việt* (“How Great Thou Art”) and *Chúa Bết Từ Cánh Chim* (“His Eye Is on the Sparrow”). The pastor prefers songs such as *Tiếng Hát Của Tôi* (“Blessed Assurance”), and *Chúa Sống* (“He Lives!”). Ru-tơ mentioned that one of her favorites is *Lòng Ước Mong* (“In His Time”).

Mác said he does not believe that Vietnamese culture has very much impact on the congregation’s worship music – except perhaps during the celebration of *Tết*. During *Tết*, the church will use songs which tend to be more traditional in style - yet have Christian themes/content in the lyrics. While Ru-tơ agreed that their worship songs are basically western and not very reflective of Vietnamese culture, she believes that this could change if Vietnamese Christians begin to write more worship music.

Certain songs were identified with particular times in the worship service. For instance, Mac said that the services are always ended with *Phục Hưng Tâm Hồn* (“Alleluia, Thine the Glory”). He also noted that the doxology *Tôn Vinh Chân*

Thần (“Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow”) is typically sung after the offering is received. However, Ru-tơ said that in some services *Tôn Vinh Chân Thần* is used prior to the benediction. During the Lord’s Supper, the Vietnamese communion song *Tiệc Thánh* (literally, “Holy Meal”) is the most commonly used music. However, *Truyện Niệm Chúa* (“According to Thy Gracious Word”) and *Ta Hi-Sing Vì Con Hết* (“I Gave My Life for Thee”) are often used during communion services as well. Also, *Viên Ngọc Đẹp Ròng* (usually translated simply as “Jewels”⁹⁹) was identified as being frequently used in services involving baby dedication.

Confession of Sin

When asked whether there are times set aside in each service for the confession of sin, the pastor identified the altar call as such a time. Ru-tơ agreed that the altar call following the sermon is such an opportunity. Mác added that when the congregation celebrates the Lord’s Supper there are also opportunities for confession of sin as well.

The pastor mentioned that Vietnamese people tend to be more private and less likely to publicly confess sin. Ru-tơ agrees but says that confession of sin is good because it breaks through that cultural aspect of their Vietnamese behavior. This implies a transformative effect of the practice. She also says that confession of sin shows publicly that you are sincere in your desire to follow God.

⁹⁹ More literally, the translation of *Viên Ngọc Đẹp Ròng* is “Round, Pretty, Little Stones.”

Confession of Faith

Ru-tơ said that though there have been confessions of faith, there have been no baptisms for a long time and suggested that more emphasis might be placed on baptism. She said that anyone who has been saved can be baptized. Some candidates quit coming to church before they are baptized but in other cases she is not sure why the baptisms have not happened. The pastor said that before baptizing candidates (those who have already confessed Jesus as Lord and Savior), they must complete a study of twelve lessons concerning Christian living over subjects such as God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the Bible, the church, and giving.

Ru-tơ said that the church has no baptistery - but the larger church in which they previously met has one that they have borrowed in the past. She sees baptism as simply a public confession of your salvation. She indicated that infant baptisms are not performed in the church but that parents may publicly dedicate their children to God during a church service. Though licensed ministers can pastor churches, only ordained ministers can perform baptisms. The pastor says that the procedure for baptizing is the same as in most other Baptist churches in America except for the use of the Vietnamese language. He will ask the candidate if he has accepted Christ and then baptize “in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”

Mác said that the act of baptism can be more significant in terms of provoking a family reaction than a simple confession of faith in Christ.¹⁰⁰ Ê-xơ-tê explained that some Vietnamese Buddhist families see the act of Christian baptism as an abandonment of family and ancestors.

Reading of Scripture

The Scriptures are read responsively early in the service – generally, sometime after the opening prayer. These readings are normally done by a lay member in this church. The pastor selects the particular reading as appropriate based on the sermon content. For example, in the May service, Responsive Reading #48 from the *Thánh Ca* was selected. In the June service, the pastor chose Responsive Reading #46. The content of both readings are lifted directly from the Scriptures.¹⁰¹ Neither the pastor nor Mác believe that Vietnamese culture is reflected in the way that these readings are done.

A passage from the *Kinh Thánh* is also read in each service by lay members prior to the sermon. This reading is the pericope from which the sermon arises. Ru-tơ believes the reading is important because it helps to focus people on the sermon topic. She does not think that Viet culture affects the way these *Kinh Thánh* readings are presented.

¹⁰⁰ He told of one young Vietnamese Christian who is very active in the church but has not been baptized because he does not want to offend his parents (who are Buddhists). He responds to this situation by trying to hold on to both Christ and (in some ways) Buddhism.

¹⁰¹ For instance, *Thánh Ca* Responsive Reading #48 is derived from Micah 6:8, Isaiah 1:17, Amos 5:24 and James 1:22, 27; and 2:8-9, 14-16. Responsive Reading #46 is derived from Deuteronomy 4:9, Colossians 2:6-8, Ephesians 4:11, 2 Thessalonians 2:15, 2 Timothy 2:15 and 2 Peter 3:18.

Preaching

As in the Vietnamese United Methodist churches, the pre-sermon Scripture readings, responsive readings and the songs sung in the service tend to be focused on the theme of the homily. The sermons given in these services were delivered primarily in the Vietnamese language. However, the pastor offered many more explanatory comments in English during the May sermon.¹⁰²

Sermons preached during these services include *Con Đường Sự Sống* or “The Path of Life” and *Mất Mà Tìm Lại Được* or “If You Fail, You Can Come Home Again.” In “The Path of Life” the main points of the sermon were: (1) The life of a Christian involves being made holy, having fellowship with other Christians, and trusting God. (2) The blessing of the Christian includes God’s abiding presence, and (3) the future of the Christian is resurrection, drinking from the river of life forever, and being joyful in His presence. In addition to the pericope on which the homily was based, the pastor referred to Acts 2: 25, Psalm 36: 8, and Romans 8: 11.

In the June service, the sermon “If You Fail, You Can Come Home Again” was based on the passage of scripture which contains the parable of “the Prodigal Son.” Important points of the sermon are: (1) We all are human and make mistakes. (2) Our heavenly Father is always willing to forgive us and take care of us. (3) Our anger (like that of the older brother in the parable) is unprofitable and sometimes destructive. (4) We ought to give our lives to Him.

¹⁰² Though the sermons were preached mostly in Vietnamese, the pastor inserted explanatory comments in English a total of 18 times during the sermon *Con Đường Sự Sống* (a total of 38 sentences/phrases). In the June sermon, *Mất Mà Tìm Lại Được*, the pastor interrupted his sermon in Vietnamese to comment in English only twice (for a total of 11 sentences/phrases).

Normally the pastor presents the sermons.¹⁰³ The pastor identified the following recurrent themes in his preaching: salvation through the cross of Christ, the love of God, overcoming temptation, the exercise of faith, the call to serve, family/marriage, and the importance of worship. Mác said that Vietnamese culture is often reflected in the pastor's sermons through the use of Asian proverbs/sayings. For instance, the Vietnamese saying "There's always a higher mountain" indicates that no matter how skilled or intelligent you are, someone will always eventually do better than you. The pastor said he might use this proverb as an illustration in a sermon about humility or to point out that ultimately "God is the highest." The pastor may also refer to poems which are particularly important in relating to the older members. He indicates that the primary goal of his preaching is to spiritually strengthen the congregation - but he also aims to help them understand how God would have them to order their lives.

Ru-tơ said that she would like to hear more preaching and teaching on how to pursue a deeper personal relationship with God. She also said that Vietnamese culture is reflected in the preaching through the use of references to Vietnamese proverbs and events that happened in Vietnam. Ru-tơ mentioned that she thinks that it is very helpful to have many references to Vietnamese culture in the sermons.

She also said that the pastor may infrequently use a Vietnamese word that the younger generation does not know. When the pastor does this, he will sometimes translate the Vietnamese word into English in order to clarify its meaning for them.

¹⁰³ However, an associate pastor preaches about once per month.

The Lord's Supper

Both the pastor and Ru-tơ said that *Tiệc Thánh* is normally celebrated on the first Sunday of each month. The pastor follows no formal set of written instructions but generally reads a passage from the eleventh chapter of 1 Corinthians.¹⁰⁴ Typically, he will mention that participation in *Tiệc Thánh* is only for Christian believers; non-Christians are not allowed to receive the elements.

Ru-tơ says that her understanding of the purpose of the Lord's Supper is to remember the death of Jesus on the cross for our sins. She also mentioned that she would like to see *Tiệc Thánh* celebrated more often than it currently is. The pastor stated that only ordained ministers can officiate at the Lord's Supper and confirmed that only Christians can receive it. Interestingly, he also mentioned that it is not required that these believers be baptized before they are allowed to receive the elements.

Offertory Collections

Offertory collections are received in each service. The offertory prayer is prayed following the responsive reading and ushers pass the offering plates among the congregation. There is no evidence that a doxology is ever offered following the receipt of the offering.¹⁰⁵ The pastor said that if you love the Lord it is important to give to the Lord's church. It is done in obedience to the

¹⁰⁴ Presumably, the pastor is referring to 1 Corinthians 11: 23-34 in which the Apostle Paul presents a short teaching concerning the Lord's Supper.

¹⁰⁵ No doxologies were sung in either of the services observed. A review of the church bulletins for this congregation indicated in every case that doxologies were not scheduled to be sung following the collection of the offertory.

Scriptures and in thanksgiving to God. But he understands why some people do not give to Lord if they do not know the Lord.

Ru-to said that different people are asked to take up the offering each week. This allows lay members of the congregation an opportunity to participate in the service. She said that congregants give in order to comply with God's command to give back ten percent of their income - and that this money is used "to care for his house." However, the congregants' motivations for giving seem to go beyond a simple sense of duty to God.

For instance, Ru-to pointed out that it is not uncommon in Asian culture for a Buddhist/animist to go to a temple and make offerings of money. However, she drew an important distinction with respect the motives of givers. According to Ru-to, when non-Christians go to a temple and give money, it is usually done when they need something. She says that when Christians give, the offering is given in heartfelt love to God – and with thankfulness for what God has *already* done.

Occasional Services

The pastor indicated that special services held at their church include Thanksgiving, Easter, Christmas, and *both* solar *and* lunar New Year services (as well as Mothers' Day and Fathers' Day). The celebrations of the two New Year services are similar with respect to preaching themes. For instance, the congregation may be reminded that life is short and that they should spend it in the worship of God - or perhaps, in service to God. Scripture texts that the pastor

associates with either of the New Year services include Psalm 1, Psalm 100, and 2 Corinthians 5:17.

However, the lunar New Year, *Tết*, is also helpful in facilitating the remembrance of Vietnamese culture and in educating children in the church about the Vietnamese way of life. According to the pastor, the church service is not significantly different. However, Mác said that at the end of the service, a “money tree” is brought out and congregants receive five-dollar bills (called “lucky money”). The children of the congregation get it first; afterwards, adults may also receive some “lucky money.”¹⁰⁶ Mác said the practice comes from Viet superstition and that it is just for fun. The pastor says this practice does not mean anything and compared it to eating fortune cookies.

Ru-ơ said that the most important of these special services is Christmas. Church members send out invitations to others in the community inviting them to attend. She says the purpose of the Christmas service is to celebrate Jesus coming down to the earth to help us to know God, to be mediator for us, and to lead us out of sin. Often the church will invite a special speaker.

Thanksgiving is also an important time of year for this congregation. The pastor typically conducts this service. Usually, he will offer remarks to remind the people to be thankful - but typically, no is sermon presented. Instead, the pastor allows congregation members to come forward and express thanks for God’s actions in their individual lives.

¹⁰⁶ The money on this tree comes from church funds.

The Vietnamese Baptist Church in Bowling Green

A Vietnamese congregation was also established in 1996 as part of the International Ministries of the First Baptist Church in Bowling Green, Kentucky. A retired missionary, a retired schoolteacher, and a deacon who had served in the military in Vietnam began the work. The current pastor was later contacted and asked to pastor the church. Visits were made to observe the congregation on February 22 and again on March 15, 2009. Services took place in one of the larger church's Sunday school rooms.¹⁰⁷ The services were mostly delivered in the Vietnamese language. The hymns were primarily sung in Vietnamese; however, some verses were sung in English. For both of the services, the pastor wore a suit and spoke with his Bible and notes resting on a small lectern. The congregation sat at tables (arranged roughly in a semicircle) and the pastor stood in the midst of them. The order of worship for each service was written on a chalkboard at the front of the room. An outline of the February 22 service follows:

1. The pastor offers greetings/welcome.
2. The pastor leads the congregation in the opening prayer.
3. Led by the pastor, they sing *Ý Nghĩa Tình Yêu* ("Love Was When").
4. Led by the pastor, the congregation sings *Tôi Biết Đấng Nắm Giữ Tương Lai* ("I Know Who Holds Tomorrow").
5. A lay member leads Responsive Reading #30.
6. The pastor offers explanatory comments about the responsive reading.

¹⁰⁷ The normal weekly schedule of the congregation includes Sunday afternoon worship beginning at 3:00 p.m. Central Standard Time (CST).

7. The pastor delivers his sermon “The True Vine and the Branches.”
8. The pastor leads a celebration of Lord’s Supper.
9. The closing prayer is led by a congregant in English only.
10. The pastor and church sing *Đổi Mới Chúng Con Hoài* (“Revive Us Again”).
11. The pastor dismisses the service and invites everyone to an informal time of fellowship over food and drink following the dismissal.

In all, there were seven congregants present - including myself. This service lasted about one hour and forty-three minutes.

The March 15th service was similar except that: (1) The pastor invited me to open the service in prayer. (2) Congregational songs included *Tuy Tôi Có Cả Thiên Hạ* or “If You Have the World but Not Jesus, It Means Nothing,” *Nguyễn Càng Yêu-Thương Christ* or “More Love to Thee” and *Theo Chúa* or “Follow On.” (3) Responsive Reading #33 was used. (4) The sermon was *Tay Đánh Lưới Người* or “Fishers of Men.” (5) There was no celebration of the Lord’s Supper and (6) at the pastor’s invitation, I closed the service in prayer. Eight congregants were present and the service lasted about one hour and twelve minutes. The following people were interviewed concerning the church’s worship practices: the pastor, the sponsoring church’s International Ministries (IM) Coordinator and two other members of the congregation (referred to here as Lu-ca and Ma-thi-tô).¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ The IM Coordinator has a Bachelor of Science degree from Western Kentucky University and taught school for twenty-three years. She also holds a Master of Religious Education degree and is certified as a Literacy & Missions Consultant for the North American Mission Board. Lu-ca is a second-generation Vietnamese American enrolled in business program at Western Kentucky University and has attended the church since its inception. Ma-thi-tô, a Sunday school teacher has been a member for seventeen years.

Prayer

In the February service, there was no opening prayer;¹⁰⁹ yet the IM Coordinator indicated that the service is normally opened with prayer. Prayers of thanksgiving, repentance and forgiveness were offered during the Lord's Supper in the February service. During that service only, the IM Coordinator led the congregation in prayer after the celebration of the Lord's Supper. The congregation was also led in prayer at the close of both services. Lu-ca said that prayer is sometimes offered in English, sometimes Vietnamese - and at other times in both languages. In these services, the pastor consistently led the congregation in prayer using both Vietnamese and English. However, when the IM Coordinator or I prayed, the prayers were in English only.

Praise

In both services, the congregational singing was consistently *a cappella*. These songs were taken from hymnals which had been placed on the tables at which the congregation sat. No special music was offered by anyone in either service and no music was played or sung during the Lord's Supper. In each case, *Đôi Mối Chúng Con Hoài* (or "Revive Us Again") was used at the close of the service. However, Ma-thi-tô said that *Tôn Vinh Chân Thần* is sometimes used to close their worship services. Lu-ca said that the pastor or Ma-thi-tô typically lead the singing. The congregational singing is executed in both Vietnamese and English, if English verses are in the hymnal for the particular song. A few years

¹⁰⁹ However, there was an acknowledgement of God's answer to prayer concerning employment for a congregant's fiancé.

ago, there was piano accompaniment in the services but no one is currently available to play the piano (or any other instrument) during worship. He mentioned that some of the songs they sing were written/composed by Vietnamese folks. He could not recall anyone offering special music.

Lu-ca said that *Lắng Nghe Tiếng Chúa*¹¹⁰ or “Listening to God’s Word” was one of his favorite songs because the message (that God’s words give you strength for life) is important. He opined that the primary reflection of Vietnamese culture in their worship music was its use of the Vietnamese language. Ma-thi-tơ also listed *Lắng Nghe Tiếng Chúa* as one of his favorite hymns. He said that it reminds us that God sometimes speaks to convict us and that we must listen and obey. The communion song, *Tiệc Thánh*, is also among Ma-thi-tơ’s favorites. However, he mentioned that the “notes applied for the western music are not used in ‘old kind’ of music.”¹¹¹ The IM Coordinator mentioned that though the church now uses the Baptist version of the *Thánh Ca*, they used to use choruses and praise music in English. She said that the current pastor implemented the use of the hymnals and that the people love the hymnal songs.

Hymns are typically chosen based on the sermon topic. Yet she noted that congregational singing tends to reflect on the believer’s relationship with God. Such songs include *Buổi Mai Với Jêsus* (“In the Garden”) and *Jêsus Là Bạn Thật*

¹¹⁰ In some books, this song is found as *Lắng Nghe Lời Chúa*. (The lyrics and music are the same.)

¹¹¹ This could refer to the difference between the diatonic scales employed in western musical compositions as opposed to the pentatonic scales more common in eastern music.

(“What a Friend We Have in Jesus”).¹¹² Also, the congregation sometimes sings an “invitational” song near the end of the service. Finally, she opined that Vietnamese Christians seem less emotional when they sing and that this may be an effect of Asian culture.

Confession of Sin

No evidence was uncovered which would suggest that there was any specific time normally set aside for the confession of sin. However, the IM Coordinator mentioned that the pastor often includes a time of prayer at the beginning (or sometimes the end) of the worship services in order to allow members of the congregation to voice their concerns or needs. While this is not a time set aside explicitly for confession of sin, it is an opportunity for those in the church to share their struggles and ask for grace and strength. Also, the service of the Lord’s Supper typically includes an “examination of conscience.” This time of prayer provides a more obvious opportunity for the congregation’s members to confess their sins. Finally, the pastor, at times, may follow his sermon with an invitation to receive salvation and forgiveness of sin through Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. For those who are just receiving Christ, the altar call provides them with an initial opportunity for confession of sin.

Confession of Faith

Similarly, there is no time which is reserved in the ordinary services for a spoken confession of faith. However, the IM Coordinator mentioned that she sees

¹¹² Literally, *Buổi Mai Với Jesus* and *Jesus Là Bạn Thật* are translated as “Tomorrow with Jesus” and “Jesus is a True Friend,” respectively.

participation in the Lord's Supper (not served to the unbaptized) as a sort of confession of faith. Baptism is a confession of faith as well. The congregation only baptizes its believers after a period of general instruction concerning Christian discipleship (including specific instruction concerning baptism's meaning). Candidates for baptism must not have been baptized previously in a Baptist congregation.¹¹³ However, those baptized in non-Baptist congregations may be candidates for baptism in this congregation. Infant baptism is not practiced but there is no minimum age for candidates. It is the pastor's responsibility to use good judgment in discerning the authenticity of the youngster's conversion. For those who are too young, a service dedicating the child to God is an option.

The IM coordinator believes that baptism pictures the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. She says that most Vietnamese in the congregation would likely share this view. Lu-ca speaks of the meaning of baptism in terms of renewal, rebirth, and the washing away of sins. He echoes the view that baptism is a testimony that one has received Christ. Ma-thi-to agrees with the concept that baptism symbolizes the washing away of sin. But he understands it as more a testimony of what God has done through Christ (rather than a confession that we have received Christ).

Reading of Scripture

Though the Bible is read in Vietnamese, the pastor often makes a concerted effort to accommodate any English speakers who are present. For

¹¹³ Those previously baptized in other Baptist congregations have been accepted as baptized Christians.

instance, after the responsive reading, the pastor usually offers explanatory comments. In the March service, he commented on the final verses of 1 Corinthians 13 which speak to the primacy of love.¹¹⁴ The pastor shared some reasons why he thought that love is the greatest: (1) People see our love and know that we are of God. (2) Love makes faith strong. (3) Life is very difficult without love. Finally, (4) love conquers all problems. He also said that we should love and forgive one another in remembrance of God's love and forgiveness to us.

According to the IM coordinator, the pastor emphasizes following along in the Bible as he reads aloud and reading with him. They usually use the *Kinh Thánh*. However, if the pastor reads the Bible in English it is typically from the *New International Version*. She also suggested that the Vietnamese congregation used responsive readings less than the larger English-speaking congregation at this church (which they refer to as the “big” church). She said that responsive readings are typically related to the sermon topic for that service. She believes that responsive readings are important because “if you see, say, and hear it, it will have more impact.”

Sometimes the pastor will ask a church member to read a certain passage in the *Kinh Thánh*. But Lu-ca and others indicated that the language of the *Kinh Thánh* is sometimes difficult for them to decode. Just as some contemporary English-speaking readers do not understand certain words in the King James Version, Ma-thi-tơ says that some congregants do not understand certain old Vietnamese words in the *Kinh Thánh*.

¹¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 13 ends by saying “These three remain, faith, hope and charity, and the greatest of these is charity.”

Preaching

According to the IM Coordinator, the pastor presents sermons in much the same way as they would be presented in an English-speaking congregation. Of course, the sermons are preached primarily in Vietnamese but there is an effort to translate at least the main points of the sermon in English (if English-speakers are present). The following themes were identified: how to live the Christian life, the importance of church attendance, and God's protection and the necessity of relationship with Christ. Topics also are often determined by the Christian calendar (Christmas and Easter, for instance) but not usually by "American" holidays (such as the Fourth of July, Memorial Day, etc.).

The pastor's homiletic intent is to teach the factual knowledge concerning Christ and the Bible – but also to instruct them how to walk with God and live a Christian lifestyle. The IM coordinator notes that the pastor never uses the "hellfire-and-brimstone" preaching style typical of some Baptist preachers. He speaks authoritatively but in a gentle way which she says reflects the compassion of Christ. She said that she believes this is true with most other Asian pastors that she has encountered.

In addition to the pastor, Ma-thi-to has preached sermons. Often, he preaches sermons focused on the importance of the word of God. Also, sermons have sometimes been delivered by English-speaking preachers. On these occasions, Ma-thi-to has translated for the congregation. He says that this is a difficult job because of the generally low level of Bible knowledge among members of the congregation. For instance, the English-speaking preachers might

say only one sentence – but the translation takes perhaps five or six sentences because of the explanations necessary for the congregation to understand. Ma-thi-to said that he believes Vietnamese culture may be reflected in their preaching by a stronger emphasis on family. Also, he indicated that the pastor incorporates Vietnamese sayings into his sermons. For instance, he recalls the pastor using this expression: “If you love someone, everything he does is good before your eyes. If no love, everything he does is wrong.” Also, in explaining the gospel to others, the pastor quoted this proverb: “If they don’t know about the crossbow, talk about bow.” In other words, use what people understand to teach them more.

The Lord’s Supper

The February service included a celebration of the Lord’s Supper. According to the pastor, the Lord’s Supper is typically celebrated once per month - usually on the first Sunday of the month.¹¹⁵ No music accompanied the distributing of the elements, however, the IM Coordinator indicated that a particular hymn, *Phước Thay Mối Dây Kết Thân* (“Blest Be the Tie That Binds”), may be sung at times near the end of the service. The pastor made several important points about the Lord’s Supper in both Vietnamese and English. For instance, when we partake of the Lord’s Supper we remember Christ’s suffering. He also said that the act symbolizes the covenant we have through Christ and that through our participation we “show the Lord’s death.” In addition, the pastor noted that the Lord’s Supper is a time when we ought to examine ourselves before we partake of the bread and of the cup (because some may need

¹¹⁵ Only the pastor may officiate at observances of the Lord’s Supper.

to ask God's forgiveness before receiving them). Then the pastor led them in prayers of thanksgiving, repentance and forgiveness, asking God to bless the bread and cup. The bread was distributed and the pastor said "Take, eat, this is my body which broken for you. This do in remembrance of me" (1 Cor. 11: 24). After this, the pastor and congregation eat the bread. Following this, the cups were distributed by two lay members.¹¹⁶ The pastor quoted from 1 Corinthians 11: 25: "This cup is the new testament in my blood, this do ye as often as ye drink it, in remembrance of me." Afterwards, the pastor and congregation drank from the cups. All prayers/remarks were spoken in both Vietnamese and English except for the IM Coordinator's closing prayer.¹¹⁷

The IM Coordinator identified some differences in the Vietnamese congregation's worship as compared to the "big church." For instance, the Vietnamese church normally receives the Lord's Supper once per month – more frequently than the "big church" (which schedules the Lord's Supper about once per quarter). Lu-ca says that this is because the pastor emphasizes its observance. Also, the IM Coordinator's impression is that the examination of conscience often accompanied by a period of prayer is stressed more than in the English-speaking congregation. She understands the Lord's Supper as a time for renewing her commitment to Christ and remembering the Lord's death. Lu-ca sees the Lord's Supper as a symbol of body and blood of Jesus, representing that idea that God sacrificed his Son for our sins in order to provide salvation for us.

¹¹⁶ The IM Coordinator mentioned in her interview that Mathi-to functions as a deacon in this congregation (administering the Lord's Supper) though he would not be recognized as one in the wider Baptist church.

¹¹⁷ Her closing prayer was in English only – without any accompanying translation into Vietnamese.

Offertory Collections

Lu-ca and the IM Coordinator agree that there is no particular time set aside for receiving the offering. Most people give their offering at the beginning of the service but sometimes they may wait until the end. They simply place their offering in an envelope and lay it at the end of the table to the right of the pastor. There is no passing of an offering plate as in the “big church” services. According to the IM Coordinator, offerings are collected as part of the general “big church” offering - and are allocated for the expenses of the church as a whole. Ma-thi-tơ said that the offerings are used for support of the church and its pastoral staff, for youth activities, and for revival services.

The pastor often references the Scriptures to indicate that offerings are given in obedience to God’s command and as part of a Christian’s commitment to God’s work. Ma-thi-tơ echoed this idea saying that they give in obedience to God’s requirement to tithe. However, the offering is also more generally viewed as simply an act of worship. The IM Coordinator believes that Vietnamese culture may influence this congregation to emphasize tithing more than it is emphasized in the English-speaking churches.

Occasional Services

The pastor and IM Coordinator mentioned that special services are held at certain times of the year, - specifically, Mothers’ and Fathers’ Day, Christmas, and Easter. However, some of these days may be celebrated in slightly different ways. For instance, the emphasis on respecting and honoring one’s parents on

Mothers' or Fathers' Day is more likely to be extended to one's grandparents as well. As with western churches, the music at these special services may involve predictable themes. At Easter, the church is likely to sing *Christ Xảy Ra* ("Christ arose") or other such songs which touch on the idea of resurrection. Christmas services are likely to include songs such as *Đêm Yên Lặng* ("Silent Night") which celebrate the birth of Christ. Also, it is common for food and fellowship to follow these special services - though it is not too uncommon for it to follow ordinary worship services.

Of course, there are special services to observe times which are not marked on most western church calendars. At *Tết*, the actions of the past year are brought to remembrance. On the Sunday after *Tết*, the pastor will usually present a teaching on how to begin the New Year. For instance, the congregation may be encouraged to continue in actions which were good and to cease from doing those which were bad. Money is usually given in a red envelope¹¹⁸ along with wishes for prosperity in the New Year but the pastor insists that this practice does not have religious meaning. Congregants may wear different clothing during the *Tết* services. The ladies will often don the long traditional dress known as the *áo dài* (literally, "long dress").¹¹⁹ The male version of this garment is the *áo gấm* - a less popular garment is usually worn only by older men.

¹¹⁸ The color red is associated with the idea of "good fortune."

¹¹⁹ The *áo dài* is a long-sleeved silk tunic with a long panel in front and in back, worn over a set of pantaloons. It went out of vogue under early communist rule, being replaced by simpler and more androgynous styles. The *áo dài*'s popularity in Vietnam has rebounded since the 1990s and it is now considered standard dress for weddings, the celebration of *Tết* and other formal occasions there.

The Vietnamese Baptist Church of Memphis, Tennessee

The Vietnamese Baptist Church of Memphis is the only Vietnamese church in this study which is pastored by a minister who is not ethnically Vietnamese. The *Hội Thánh Tin Lành Báp-Tit Việt Nam tại Memphis* (Vietnamese Protestant Baptist Church at Memphis) was founded in the mid-1980s on the northern outskirts of Memphis, Tennessee. The church's current pastor, Reverend Doug Kellum, is a former missionary who began his involvement with the Vietnamese people while serving in the military.¹²⁰ When Saigon fell in 1975, he worked for two years as a sort of missionary's assistant at a church in Danang before entering into refugee work in Thailand and Cambodia. Before long, he and his coworkers began to see professions of faith among the refugees and he soon found himself pastoring a church in Lam Sing, Thailand. After about five years, he transferred to missionary work in the Philippines, serving there for the next fourteen years. In 1984, while Rev. Kellum was still serving as a Southern Baptist missionary, he came home on a furlough and prepared to travel to various speaking engagements. Contacts in the refugee camp had already informed him of the existence of Vietnamese Christians at a Baptist church in Memphis. However, the Vietnamese who attended that church did not understand much of the services. Arrangements were made for him and some others to accompany a group of these Vietnamese Christians to a Vietnamese

¹²⁰ He left graduate school and was accepted into an army officer program. On completion of Officer Candidate School, Kellum was sent to a military language institute to learn the Vietnamese language. After this, he was assigned to duty as an advisor, working primarily with Vietnamese troops in South Vietnam.

Church in Fort Smith, Arkansas. While returning from this trip, members of this group caught the vision to start their own Vietnamese church in Memphis.

The Berclair Baptist Church in Memphis allowed this nascent Vietnamese congregation to use a Sunday school room for its early meetings. Initially, they simply formed their own Sunday school class. Later, they began to listen to tapes of Vietnamese sermons when they met each week. Then some of the members began to take turns sharing on Sundays. Finally, in 1988, the church called its first pastor, Paul Pham, who was just graduating from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He led regular worship services in that Baptist church until 1994 – eventually using their chapel to accommodate the growing numbers. That same year, they began to meet in their own separate sanctuary, rented from a local Chinese congregation. However, in April 1996, the first pastor of *Hội Thánh Tin Lành Báp-Tít Memphis* resigned. Since that time, the church has been led by Rev. Kellum. He holds a Master of Religious Education degree and managed to get within one semester of a Master of Divinity degree before deciding to focus on his practice of ministry. He believes that the best way a church can develop is by placing people into decision-making positions as soon as possible - rather than simply telling them how to worship. Of course, this requires that the pastor trust the Holy Spirit to guide the people - and trust the people to respond to the Holy Spirit. This atmosphere allows congregants input into the church's worship planning. Most churches he observed in Southeast Asia were "carbon copies of western churches." This situation led locals to the view that becoming a Christian required giving up their Vietnamese culture – an idea that

never set well with Pastor Kellum. As a result, he intentionally looks for ways to incorporate attributes of Vietnamese culture into the congregation's worship.

The congregation's approach with respect to the use of language has evolved over the years. In the beginning, the Vietnamese language was used almost exclusively. However, the eventual appearance of children and youth who had been raised in the United States made it reasonable to incorporate the use of English. The church began by using English in the Sunday school classes for the children. Eventually, the pastor began to preach sermons bilingually. More recently, some younger folks (or others who prefer English) have been excused following the congregational singing to attend their own service in a separate area. In addition, the congregation has also incorporated songs with English lyrics into its worship music. There is some tension between certain members over this issue. The traditionalists believe the younger folk should worship in Vietnamese and that Sunday school should be used as an opportunity to sharpen their skills in the Vietnamese language. Conversely, there are those who see that the "heart language" of their children and youth is English. For them, the use of English assures that the communication of the gospel will be clearer and more meaningful to them.

The Vietnamese Baptist Church of Memphis was visited on July 19 and August 16, 2009 and again on October 4, 2009.¹²¹ The services were conducted primarily in the Vietnamese language. However, there was considerable

¹²¹ After my initial visit to this church, I discovered that a significant part of the service (nearly half) had not been properly recorded on my video camera. Therefore, it was necessary to visit *Hội Thánh Tin Lành Báp-Tít Memphis* a third time. The normal weekly schedule of the church includes Sunday school from 9:45 to 10:40 a.m. and Sunday morning worship from 11:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. CST.

explanation provided for English-speakers as well. In the August service, the speaker would typically offer a few paragraphs in Vietnamese - followed by a few sentences of explanation in English. However, the method of communicating English to the congregation was different in the October service. That service was conducted entirely in Vietnamese but earphones were available which allowed congregants to hear an English translation of the service.

Services took place in the main sanctuary of the church. The sanctuary was equipped with pulpit and altar table. The pastor wore a sport jacket with a casual shirt underneath. Choir members were on the platform during the song service. They wore white choir robes with gold trim. A projection screen was used to communicate song lyrics and other elements of the service. The sanctuary was decorated with various flowers near the pulpit and banners hung on the wall behind the pulpit. The wall behind the platform was partly brick and partly brown paneling with stained glass windows. An outline of the August 16th service follows:

1. The pastor presents a greeting/welcome.
2. An opening prayer is led by two lay members.
3. The lay leader leads the congregation in singing *Chiến Binh Thập Tự* (“Soldier of Christ”) in Vietnamese only.
4. The lay leader leads the congregation in singing *Ngợi Danh Giê-hô-va* (“Praise the Name of Jehovah”) in Vietnamese only.
5. The lay leader leads the congregation in singing *Chim, Hoa Và Người* (“Birds, Flowers and People”) in Vietnamese only.

6. A congregant offers special music in Vietnamese only.
7. A lay leader prays a brief prayer in Vietnamese only.
8. Various members offer testimonies/prayer requests in Vietnamese. One congregant offered thanks to God and requested prayer in English.
9. The pastor leads the congregation in prayer (Vietnamese only).
10. The lay leader introduces the offertory and the collection is received.
11. The congregation sings *Lạy Thượng Đế* (“Lord, I Want to Be a Christian”).
12. The lay person prays an offertory prayer.
13. The lay leader reads Xuất Ê-díp-tô Ký 20:8-11 (Exodus 20: 8-11).
14. The pastor delivers his sermon *Danh Chúa* (“The Name of God”).
15. The pastor invites congregants to receive Christ as Lord and Savior and the pastor leads two women in a prayer of salvation.
16. The lay leader presents sundry announcements.
17. The pastor offers closing remarks and dismisses the congregation in prayer.

The service lasted about an hour and fifty-four minutes and 189 congregants attended.¹²²

The October 4th service was similar but also included a celebration of the Lord’s Supper. The altar table was covered with a white cloth and upon it rested the communion elements. The communion elements were also covered with a white cloth. A wine-colored cloth which displayed the words from Luke 22: 19-

¹²² Average attendance at *Hội Thánh Tin Lành Báp-Tít Việt Nam tại Memphis* was just over 186 for the calendar year 2009.

20 in Vietnamese was draped over the top of the white cloth which covered the elements. During the prelude, the projector screen displayed various Bible verses in Vietnamese and English. Other than these differences, the arrangement of the sanctuary was the same as in the August service.

The events of October's service were also similar to those in August with the following exceptions: (1) There was no opening prayer/greeting. (2) Songs included *Dâng Lời Suy Tôn* or "We Bring the Sacrifice of Praise," *Chúa Là Tất Cả* or "He's Everything to Me," *Đau Thương Tiêu Mất ở Nơi Gô-gô-tha* or "Burdens Are Lifted at Calvary," *Sự Bình An* or "My Peace," and *Cung Điện Bàng Ngà* or "Ivory Palace."¹²³ (3) There was no special music. (4) The *Kinh Thánh* reading was Xuất Ê-díp-tô Ký 20: 15. (5) The pastor's sermon was *Chớ Trộm Cướp* or "Stop Thief!" (6) The service included a celebration of the Lord's Supper. (7) This service did not include an altar call. The service lasted about one hour and forty-five minutes with 145 people attending. Following these services, the pastor and certain congregants (identified here as Gia-cốp, Giô-sép, Na-ô-mi, Ma-ri, Da-vít, Áp-ra-ham and Ti-mô-thê) were interviewed concerning their worship practices.¹²⁴

¹²³ This title is translated more literally as "Palace by Him."

¹²⁴ At the time of the interview, Gia-cốp and Giô-sép had been members of this church for eight years and eighteen years, respectively. Gia-cốp's father was converted in Vietnam when Gia-cốp was ten years old. However, Gia-cốp was not converted until left to study in Saigon City. Giô-sép (now 27 years old) was converted at the age of thirteen years after coming to the U.S.

Na-ô-mi has been a member of the Vietnamese Baptist Church in Memphis for four years. She left Vietnam as one of the boat people and landed in a refugee camp in Indonesia at ten years of age. Na-ô-mi was separated from her parents for about three years. But when they were reunited with her, she found that they had been baptized as Christians in a Philippine refugee camp. She was converted at about age 13 - soon after their reunion. Ma-ri has been a member of the church in Memphis for 17 years. Unlike Na-ô-mi, she was raised in a Christian family. Ma-ri came here in 1992 and was baptized in the Memphis church.

Da-vít has been a member of the Vietnamese Baptist Church in Memphis for 20 years. He grew up in a Buddhist family but was converted through the ministry of Paul Pham. Áp-ra-

Prayer

Observations of the Memphis church's worship services manifest a discernible pattern for prayer in the order of the service. Moreover, of the churches included in this study, this church devotes more time and attention to prayer than any other. For instance, in the October service, the service is punctuated with prayer seven times. In fact, an average of about thirty-one minutes was devoted to prayer/prayer requests in the period following the opening praise songs alone. According to Ti-mô-thê, this emphasis on prayer and prayer requests is a significant departure from other Baptist churches (where he says that they simply place the names of those needing prayer in the bulletin).

The following times were set aside for prayer in the Memphis congregation's services: (1) the opening prayer, (2) after the song service – when laity (and sometimes, the pastor, too) leads in prayer (3) after the offering, (4) after the sermon – when prayer occurs as either a prayer for salvation following an altar call or as a transition to *Tiệc Thánh* and (5) at the close of the service. The October service included additional prayer for the consecration of the elements used in the *Tiệc Thánh* and a recitation of the Lord's Prayer after the elements have been consumed. The congregation always stood during prayer and in every case, prayers were offered in the Vietnamese language only. However, the Lord's Prayer was displayed on a projection screen at the front of the

ham has been a member of the Vietnamese Baptist Church in Memphis for 22 years. He was baptized in a Philippine refugee camp in 1986 by the current pastor. Ti-mô-thê has been a member for only two years. He works in the translation ministry and helps with the youth on a volunteer basis. He was raised in a Christian family but "became a committed Christian" when he was 22 years old before coming to the U.S. in 2003.

sanctuary in both Vietnamese and English. (Ti-mô-thê also mentioned that Lord's Prayer is not used this way in many Baptist churches he has attended because it is "not part of the Baptist tradition.") Finally, all prayers led by the pastor - and usually those led by laity - concluded with the congregation praying in unison "*nhân danh Đức Chúa Jêsus-Christ, A-men.*" Pastor Kellum indicates that this is very traditional in Vietnamese churches in both Vietnam and the United States. The pastor also says that most of the congregation believes that they should stand during prayer to show respect for God.

On months which contain a fifth Sunday, a time of fasting and prayer is held.¹²⁵ The time is not rigidly programmed but is offered on a "come as you will" basis. Rather than scheduled times of song/testimonies/prayer, etc., congregants are invited to come and stay as long as they like in an attitude of prayer. Again, though the emphasis is on prayer, there may be times of testimony and singing as well.

Praise

Five singers lead the congregational singing accompanied by an electric guitar, electric piano, and a drum set. However, Gia-cốp and Giô-sép mentioned that flutes, clarinet and bass guitar have also been used at times. Ti-mô-thê added that he has heard acoustic guitar, violin and harmonica in past services. The pastor mentioned that one church member occasionally presents special music using traditional instruments including the monochord (*dàn bầu*) and certain flutelike instruments (such as the *dich* and *tiêu*). Also, one church member has

¹²⁵ Usually, it is held from 1:00 to 6:00 p.m. on the final Sunday of that month.

even written some Vietnamese Christian music in traditional styles using Asian modes. The use of traditional music and instruments is usually reserved for special music rather congregational singing.

Special music is sometimes provided in the congregation in traditional Vietnamese musical styles. In the October service, the special music was *Phiero Chối Chúa* ("Peter Denies the Lord"); this is a *cải lương* song about Peter's denial of Jesus on the eve of the crucifixion. The instruments used for the congregational singing also provided accompaniment for the special music. However, that accompaniment was augmented by an additional congregation member who played a Vietnamese flute. This special music was sung entirely in the Vietnamese language. The tune of the special music performed in the August service was to a secular Vietnamese folk song.¹²⁶ Prior to singing, the singer provided a lengthy apologetic for using a song with a secular tune because the use of such tunes had been previously criticized by some congregants.

Gia-cốp said that some traditional Vietnamese instruments had fallen out use over the last few years – perhaps, because of associations with secular music. However, in general, there is a slight trend for traditional music to be increasingly used in the service. The pastor indicated that one cause of this may be the fact that certain songs which sound good to westerners do not appeal to the Vietnamese listener.

Certain other patterns emerge with respect to song selection. Predictably, songs used for the offertory typically address the idea of giving. Most other songs

¹²⁶ Its original words had been replaced with Christian lyrics.

tend to be related to the theme of that day's sermon. However, Ti-mô-thê indicated that themes of the songs often address God's protection, love, forgiveness, peace, and the "fatherhood" of God. The doxology is usually used to end each service. According to Ti-mô-thê, the doxology comes from the tradition of the CMA churches.¹²⁷ The communion song, *Tiệc Thánh*, is commonly used for the service of the Lord's Supper.¹²⁸ According to Gia-cốp, the song for baby dedications is always the same, *Viên Ngọc Đẹp Ròng* ("Jewels").

In all cases, lyrics for the congregational songs were provided on the projector screen at the front of the sanctuary. Though most songs were taken from the Baptist version of the *Thánh Ca*, some are translations of contemporary western music. In the August service, all songs were sung in Vietnamese only. However, in the October service, all songs except *Cung Điện Bằng Ngài* ("Ivory Palace") were sung with at least one verse in English. Though that service ended with the congregation singing *Tôn Vinh Chân Thần* ("Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow") in Vietnamese only, the lyrics were displayed on the projector screen in both Vietnamese and English.

In nearly every case, the congregants stood during all congregational singing. The exception to this was the offertory song. As the offering bags are passed through the congregation, the congregants are all seated. During this time, the worship team is playing and singing but individual congregants may or may

¹²⁷ Ti-mô-thê also notes that the doxology is not used in this way in most Baptist churches – again, because it is not part of the Baptist tradition.

¹²⁸ Lyrics to the communion song, *Tiệc Thánh*, were authored by a Vietnamese person, however, the music was written by Carl Gotthard Liander, a Finnish composer.

not be singing. When the bags have been collected and taken to the front of the sanctuary, the congregants stand and join the song leaders in singing the final verse.

The pastor mentioned some problems regarding the tonal aspects of the Vietnamese language and its influence on the translation of English songs into Vietnamese. As previously mentioned, traditional Vietnamese music uses melodies which are influenced by the tonal aspects of the Vietnamese language. This problem often prevents any direct translation of the exact meaning of song while retaining the original music. A related problem surfaces when trying to use western style harmonies for such translated songs. Because the different parts sung in western style harmonies move in different directions (up or down in pitch), the various singers of the harmonies may be singing lyrics which have completely different meanings. For this reason, it is not uncommon to find grins and “knowing looks” being exchanged between members of the worship team when attempting to sing various parts using the same words. Despite these difficulties, some songs can be translated quite faithfully using the same melody. One example is the doxology, *Tôn Vinh Chân Thần*, which the pastor described as “well written and follow[ing] the true meaning” of original western song.

Gia-cốp and Giô-sép both enjoy the hymns sung by this congregation. Gia-cốp mentioned that *Bức Thành Kiên Cố* (“A Mighty Fortress is Our God”) is one of his favorites. He appreciates the history of the hymn; its message strengthens his faith. In addition to the hymns, Giô-sép likes the more contemporary worship songs like *Trái Tim Tôn Thờ* (“The Heart of Worship”).

He said that this song reminds us that the particular music used in worship is less important than the attitude of our hearts in worship. *Khát Khao Dòng Nước* (“As the Deer”) and *On Lạ Lùng* (“Amazing Grace”) are favorites of Na-ô-mi. Ma-ri likes *Chúa Oai Quyền* (“Awesome God”). One of Da-vít’s favorites is *Chim Sẻ Mắt Chúa Vẫn Chú Vào* (“His Eye is on the Sparrow”). He likes it because he appreciates the comfort of knowing that God is watching over him.

Gia-cốp says that Vietnamese congregations tend to sing songs slowly and that this slowness reflects several aspects of Vietnamese culture. First, the solemnity of the singing relates the seriousness of the Vietnamese attitude towards worship. Also, it suggests an attitude of politeness and respect in worship. For this same reason, he says Vietnamese avoid moving around much in worship (for instance, there is no jumping or dancing as in some churches). In a separate interview, Na-ô-mi also mentioned that Vietnamese congregations tend to have more reserved worship. She said that they are less likely to raise their hands or move around in worship. Sa-mu-ên believes that this more reserved worship is a way of showing respect for God in the service.

Confession of Sin

The congregation’s pastor indicated that no particular portion of their services is reserved for the confession of sin every Sunday. However, frequently, the pastor will offer an invitation to receive Christ as Lord and Savior near the end of the service. In certain cases, the invitation may also be extended to

Christians in the congregation to come forward and pray (for instance, if they feel that God has spoken to them about a certain issue). Also, on the last Sunday of each quarter, the worship service is a time of praise and testimony. These services - as well as the “fifth Sunday” services of prayer and fasting - may also involve times of confession of sin.

Na-ô-mi and Da-vít mentioned that the celebration of the Lord’s Supper usually includes an examination of conscience which also provides an opportunity for believers to confess their sins. Such an examination of conscience was observed in the October service when the pastor prepared the congregation to receive the elements.

Confession of Faith

There is no time specifically allocated in the service for formal confessions of faith such as the recitation of creeds. However, other opportunities arise for less structured confessions of faith. Congregants may give testimonies during the period allotted for prayer requests. Also, Na-ô-mi and Da-vít pointed out that initial confessions of faith may occur in response to an altar call. In some services, the baptism of new believers provides a common and historic way of confessing faith in Christ.

Baptisms are performed only for those persons who have professed faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The action-field context also requires that the baptismal candidate complete ten training sessions prior to receiving baptism.¹²⁹

¹²⁹ The training sessions include ten lessons covering the following subjects: the Bible, God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, Humanity, Sin, Salvation, New Life in Christ, Prayer, and the Church. After the lessons have been completed, a test is administered with 20 questions

The church does not practice infant baptism, however, children may be “dedicated” or “presented” to the Lord. (The pastor interprets this not as dedicating a child to the Lord so much as dedicating the parents and congregation to nurture the child spiritually.)

The pastor affirmed that only an ordained minister is allowed to perform baptisms in this congregation and that all baptisms are by immersion only. Though there is no formal liturgy involved, the pastor described his typical actions as follows: (1) The pastor introduces the candidate to the congregation, saying “This is _____ son of _____.” (2) The pastor says to the candidate, “Because you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior and have been cleansed of your sins, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” (3) Finally, as the candidate is lowered into the water, the pastor says, “Your old life in sin has been washed away by the blood of Jesus and you have moved into a new life in Him.”

The meaning of baptism was described in various ways. The pastor said that baptism enacts and demonstrates the change (salvation) that has already happened in that person’s life. Gia-cốp called it a “public confession of faith” and noted that it involves recognizing the death and resurrection of Christ. Giô-sép said that it was an act of obedience to God following a person’s conversion. Timô-thê echoed Gia-cốp’s belief that baptism was a public confession that the person had received Christ as Savior. He also said that the act symbolizes a new life with Christ.

covering these subjects. Also the candidates are asked, “What would you like to pray to God for today?” There is no minimum score required to pass the test. However, the pastor examines each candidate’s answers and determines whether they need more teaching in a particular area.

Reading of Scripture

Services may include at least two occasions for reading the *Kinh Thánh*. Responsive readings of scripture may be read by the lay leader of the service. The verses are chosen by the lay leader and may be inserted into the order of worship at whatever time he or she chooses. (However, they may not be included in the service at all.) The responsive readings are always read entirely in the Vietnamese language. This exclusive use of Vietnamese can create a problem if the responsive reading is done before those with a preference for English are excused from the main service. Sometimes, the leader arranges to have the words to the responsive readings both in Vietnamese and English. However, this only solves part of the problem. The English speakers can understand what is being said but obviously chaos ensues if they try to join in reading aloud. Usually, the *Kinh Thánh* is read responsively between the worship leader and the congregation. Yet it may also be read alternating between the men and women of the congregation.

In addition to responsive readings of the *Kinh Thánh*, the sermon's pericope is also read prior to the homily by a lay worship leader or another lay person. In each of the observed services, the *Kinh Thánh* was read following the offertory and immediately prior to the homily. The pastor and several other interviewees indicated that the purpose of this practice is to focus the congregation on the subject of the homily (or perhaps in some cases, to introduce them to it). However, Giô-sép indicated that it demonstrates that the ideas in the preaching originate with God rather than a human person. Gia-cốp said that

Vietnamese believe in “doing things because of evidence” and that the *Kinh Thánh* text becomes “an *evidence* of the truth of the sermon” (emphasis added). Da-vít echoed this idea in saying that it “provides [a] basis for believing what pastor teaches.”

Both the pastor and all members of the congregation always stand whenever the *Kinh Thánh* is read. This is done out of profound respect for the word of God. The *Kinh Thánh* is after all, in Ti-mô-thê’s words, “from the King!”

Preaching

The sermon given in the July service was delivered in both English and in Vietnamese. The pastor would preach a paragraph or two in Vietnamese and then preach in English. Sermons for the other services observed were delivered entirely in the Vietnamese language.¹³⁰ The pastor’s sermon in August was *Danh Chúa* (“The Name of God”). In October, the sermon was *Chớ Trộm Cờp* (“Stop Thief!”). These sermons are connected in that they are both part of a sermon series on the Decalogue from the *Kinh Thánh* text in Xuất Ê-díp-tô Ký 20 (Exodus 20). In *Danh Chúa*, the pastor spoke of the importance of honoring God’s name, citing compliance with the commandment in Exodus 20: 7 (“Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.”). He said that God is referred to as

¹³⁰ This change in language use was connected to the introduction of audio equipment which allows congregants to listen to sermons in English using headphones. A translator in the sound booth provides this translation for listeners as the sermon is being preached. Obviously, this equipment negates the need for the speaker to alternate between Vietnamese and English during the sermon.

Elohim and *Yahweh* (or “Jehovah”) but since there is no similar word in Vietnamese, translators rendered the “name” of God as *Giê-hô-va* – similar to “Jehovah.” He also explained that taking the name in vain means “using the name in a disrespectful or demeaning way.” He gave various examples of how we sometimes dishonor God’s name: (1) The use of profanity is disrespectful to God. (2) When we complain “O, my God” we demean his name. (3) Praying empty prayers that you do not really mean or (4) praying long impressive, showy prayers demeans the name by stealing attention from it for ourselves. (5) Finally, as Christians we are his “namesakes.” Thus if we live disobedient or ungodly lives, we demean his name.

The pastor’s sermon in October, *Chớ Trộm Cờp*, addressed the biblical admonition in Exodus 20: 15 (“Thou shalt not steal”). This sermon pointed out numerous ways in which we steal - though we may often pretend that we are not stealing - such as: (1) pilfering office supplies, (2) not paying taxes, (3) stealing time that we owe to God, (4) robbing God of the use of our talents and abilities, (5) robbing God of offerings, (6) stealing blessings from ourselves through our disobedience to God.

The pastor did not identify any recurrent themes in his preaching but indicated that he usually selects a theme and preaches on that theme for several weeks (perhaps a quarter). On or near holidays, some sermons are based on - or at least refer to – themes associated with those holidays (that is, either U.S. or Vietnamese holidays). Ti-mô-thê mentioned that most of the sermons are tied to

the idea of salvation through Jesus Christ.¹³¹ Particularly important to him is the concept of forgiveness. Ti-mô-thê says that God's forgiveness implies we should be humble (recognizing our own faults) and that we should forgive others as God forgives us.

Na-ô-mi and Gia-cốp added that sermons often reflect on how to live a properly Christian life or "the application of faith" (husbands, love your wives; wives, respect your husbands; use the name of God appropriately; do not smoke, drink, swear, or gamble). However, Gia-cốp mentioned that he would appreciate more "theological teaching" (for example, on the Trinity, how Christian beliefs compare to others, etc.). Conversely, Giô-sép said that he would like to hear more about God's love and grace.

The pastor sometimes draws on Vietnamese proverbs for use in illustrating certain important ideas in his sermons. One such proverb suggests that "a father's love is like a tall mountain, a mother's love is like a stream." This is the sort of proverb that might appear in a sermon on Mothers' Day (or Fathers' Day). The love of a mother would be likened to a stream that never stops gently flowing. Another proverb roughly translates as "one tree is useless but with three trees you can make a fortress."¹³² The point here is that a single log can not stand up by itself but three can be fastened together so that they will stand sturdily. Naturally, this proverb is used to underscore the importance of unity and working together. The pastor relates this proverb to the biblical assertion that "... a threefold cord is

¹³¹ Ti-mô-thê also commented that the sermons of Vietnamese preachers are usually more stern and critical than those of American preachers.

¹³² This is a paraphrase which reflects the meaning better than the more literal translation: "One tree does not make a mountain but three trees make a tall mountain."

not quickly broken.” (Ecclesiastes 4:3b). He indicated that it could also be appropriate for use in sermons about building a family. (In this case, the three trees would be analogous to the husband, the wife, and God.)

Gia-cốp believes that it is important to make the gospel “more Vietnamese, less an American gospel” as an aid to evangelizing other Vietnamese folks. He mentioned one traditional proverb that he has heard used as a sermon illustration during an altar call: “When you drink the water, think of the source of the water.” This proverb implies a debt to the one who dug the well. The implication is clear to Vietnamese folks. You are enjoying the good things of life – so consider the source of all these things (that is, God).

Gia-cốp also mentioned that the pastor sometimes refers to a certain Vietnamese expression which is used when a problem arises. They say, “*Trời ơi*,” as a cry for help. When they do this, it is a cry to *Ông Trời*. The Vietnamese Baptist Christians in Memphis believe that *Ông Trời* is the same person as *Giê-hô-va* (that is, “Jehovah”).

Ti-mô-thê noted that the pastor sometimes quotes from traditional Vietnamese poetry, such as the *Tale of Kieu*. One example is the phrase which describes a treacherous person, “on the outside smiling but on the inside killing you without a knife.” The pastor explained that he might use this as an illustration of hypocrisy or unfaithfulness to the Lord. He may frequently refer to events which transpired during the Vietnam War in his preaching as well. In one such case, the pastor recounted the story of his arrival in Vietnam as a soldier, his subsequent return to the United States, and his eventual decision to become a

missionary. He used this story to illustrate that God has a purpose for everyone's life – though that purpose may not be immediately clear. The implication for the congregants is that their escape from Vietnam is not the end of God's dealings with them. He has a purpose to fulfill in each of their lives. In one sermon, the pastor quoted former Vietnamese leader Nguyễn Văn Thiệu, one of the last few presidents before the fall of Saigon. He said, "Don't listen to what the communists say but look at what they do." The pastor found this a useful illustration to underscore the importance of living the Christian witness not just talking about it.

The pastor noted that translation problems sometimes necessitate more explanation in his sermons than might be required in English-speaking churches. For instance, in preaching his sermon about the name of God, *Danh Chúa*, a clarification was necessary when he quoted the verse which says "Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain." The pastor used the Cadman translation which renders "in vain" as *làm chơi* ("in a playful manner"). To make the meaning clear, he thought it necessary to define "in vain" more sharply as "in an empty or disrespectful way" rather than "in a playful way."

The Lord's Supper

The sacrament of *Tiệc Thánh* (literally, "holy meal") is normally celebrated on the first Sunday of every month near the end of worship service. The Lord's Supper is open to all who believe in Jesus as their Savior and are baptized. The pastor confirmed that only an ordained minister may officiate at the Lord's Supper. However, he is usually assisted by four deacons. The typical

procedure begins with the congregation seated and proceeds as follows: (1) The pastor will offer some introductory comments about the meaning of the Lord's Supper and (2) an examination of conscience. (3) Deacons distribute the elements - individual wafers and cups - to members of the congregation as the worship team plays a song. (4) The pastor prays before the congregation partakes of the elements. (5) The pastor and congregation consume the elements together. (6) The pastor offers closing remarks. (7) Finally, the congregation stands and (8) the pastor leads them in a recitation of the Lord's Prayer.

In the pastor's comments, he indicated a memorialist understanding of the Lord's Supper and stressed the importance of the body and blood of Christ as essential for salvation. Na-ô-mi and Gia-cốp also described their understanding of the Lord's Supper as a remembrance of Christ's death. Giô-sép mentioned specifically that the bread represented the Lord's body and the juice symbolized the blood of Jesus. Gia-cốp said that the Lord's Supper is celebrated very solemnly in the Vietnamese church. He believes this reflects the seriousness of Vietnamese culture.

Offertory Collections

In the August and October services, offertory collections were received weekly following the period used for prayer/prayer requests and prior to the *Kinh Thánh* reading of the pericope. The exact placement of the offering in the order of service may vary a little. However, it is normally after the youth are excused and prior to the sermon. The normal sequence of events is as follows: (1) The lay leader introduces the offertory. (2) The collection is received by passing offering

bags among the congregation as the worship team plays an appropriate song. The congregation is seated until the final verse of the song. (3) The congregation stands and joins in singing the final verse of the offertory song. (4) Finally, a lay person prays an offertory prayer with the congregation still standing. In the August service, the worship team played *Lạy Thượng Đế* while the offering plate was being passed. In the October service, the offertory hymn was *Sự Bình An*. In each case, the singers alternated between Vietnamese and English verses.

The pastor says that offerings are given out of obedience to God and as an expression of worship and thanksgiving. Na-ô-mi particularly linked the offering to the idea of thanksgiving; similarly, Ti-mô-thê mentioned that he gives in response to God's many blessings. However, his main motivation for giving is simple obedience to the Scriptures. More pragmatically, Ti-mô-thê also noted that the offering functions to raise money for the operation of the church.

Some in the church mentioned that they believe the use of offering bags (versus plates) represents an influence of Vietnamese culture. The pastor believes that this preference reflects a culturally prevalent desire for privacy in giving that surpasses that of most American believers. Gia-cốp, Da-vít and Na-ô-mi concurred with his assessment that this preference indicates a strong cultural desire for privacy in giving. However, Na-ô-mi was a little unsure of the strength of this connection to culture upon later reflection since the Scripture does say “. . . let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth” when giving (Matthew 6: 3b). Gia-cốp asserted that the idea of giving itself is obviously consistent with Vietnamese culture since Vietnamese worshippers of every religion are expected

to bring gifts. But the manner in which the offering is received is to some degree inconsistent with that culture. In Vietnamese culture, one is expected to simply place the offering somewhere in the temple rather than having it collected from you by someone passing a bag among the congregants.

Occasional Services

According to the pastor, special services are held on *Tết*, Easter, Christmas, and Thanksgiving.¹³³ Congregants are more likely to wear traditional Vietnamese clothing (such as the *áo dài* or *áo gấm*) to church at these times and to invite people to church from the local community. At the celebration of *Tết*, something approximating the traditional *Tết* tree is used. Branches cut from a local tree are used to construct the *Tết* tree and brightly colored flowers are affixed to the tree with glue. The “fruit” of the tree consists of red envelopes with Bible verses inside the envelopes instead of money.¹³⁴ These envelopes are reserved for the congregation’s children.

Gia-cốp said that the worship service associated with the celebration of *Tết* usually incorporates special songs and unique decorations. The songs, for instance, emphasize renewal or the grace that God bestows on his people for the coming new year – sometimes, even the idea of resurrection. Though Gia-cốp and Na-ô-mi mentioned the beautiful flowers used to decorate the sanctuary during *Tết*, Gia-cốp was careful to point out that no lotus flowers would be used

¹³³ There is also a festival called *Tết Trung-thu* (also called the the Mid-autumn Festival or Full Moon Festival), which is celebrated primarily for the children. However, Gia-cốp and Ap-ra-ham said that the Mid-autumn Festival is held outside the church’s sanctuary and does not involve an actual worship service.

¹³⁴ The verses are written in the Vietnamese language using the demotic script and the appropriate diacritical marks. However, the letters are formed “in a Chinese style.”

because the lotus is an important symbol in Buddhism. The pastor interpreted the congregation's understanding of *Tết* as a celebration of "newness" or "new life."¹³⁵ Ma-ri pointed out that these services have the additional purpose of teaching the younger generations about Vietnamese tradition.¹³⁶

In the Memphis church, the Vietnamese view the Thanksgiving holiday as more a church celebration than a family celebration. Many of them have been told the story of the early American settlers' celebration of Thanksgiving. Yet their version of the holiday does not focus on the historical Thanksgiving that most Americans would have in mind.¹³⁷ As in other Viet churches, their concept of Thanksgiving is more closely related to thankfulness for God's blessings in the present day. In their Thanksgiving services, the sermon may be abbreviated - or even omitted. This allows extra time for the expression of that thankfulness in the form of spoken testimonies. These testimonies may include expressions of thankfulness for God's blessing in lives of friends or family members – even departed loved ones. Gia-cốp opined that congregants may occasionally deviate too far from the main purpose of Thanksgiving in their expressions of gratitude to their father, mother, etc., - rather than focusing on thanking God, the source of every good gift.

At Easter and Christmas, the church usually presents plays to the congregation. These tend to be fairly elaborate productions mostly involving the

¹³⁵ The celebration of *Tết* is so important to the marking of time that a Vietnamese person reckons his or her age by counting the number of *Tết* celebrations through which he or she has lived. Therefore it is common for the "Vietnamese age" of a person to differ from that person's chronological age.

¹³⁶ This tends to validate V. W. Turner's assertion that ritual has the effect of enhancing social solidarity.

¹³⁷ For instance, decorations rarely emphasize themes connected to turkeys or Pilgrims.

children, but often many of the church's older members as well. The sanctuary is adorned with Christmas decorations and a Christmas tree positioned to the right of the platform.

An Analysis of Vietnamese Baptist Worship

Most Southern Baptist churches use a predetermined order of service which is either published in a printed bulletin or displayed on a projector screen. In the majority of these churches, congregants sing traditional hymns and use hymnals. However, most of these churches also use praise and worship choruses at least once per month.¹³⁸ A minority of these churches - about 40 percent - use congregational or responsive readings on a monthly basis. Also, at least 97 percent of these churches reported that they "pass an offering plate/bag/basket" during their services.

Southern Baptist preachers deliver sermons which were reported as lasting an average of 32 minutes. Their beliefs have been influenced by both Arminian and Calvinistic theologies - but particularly, by the concept known as *sola Scriptura*. Therefore, Baptist sermons are theologically influenced much more by the Bible itself than by church tradition, reason and experience. Also, since the Bible is seen as the sole authority, Baptists typically reject authoritarian creeds. Baptists do not technically recognize any *sacraments*. However, they do observe baptism and the Lord's Supper as *ordinances*. Neither of the ordinances is seen as effecting any salvific or sanctifying change. Baptism is only conferred on those who have made a conscious decision to follow Christ in faith and

¹³⁸ About 30 percent of these congregations may use Christian rock, pop, or country music in their services but only about 3 percent use secular music.

repentance; thus, infant baptism is not practiced in their churches. The Lord's Supper is celebrated by about three-fourths of these congregations at least monthly. The standard view of baptism in these churches is memorialist as indicated in the *Baptist Faith and Message*¹³⁹ (see Appendix III).

Reverend J. Derek Yelton, the pastor of Beechmont Baptist Church in Louisville,¹⁴⁰ said that their services are like those of the Vietnamese Baptist Church in Louisville.¹⁴¹ No particular order of worship is adhered to at Beechmont Baptist Church (and none is required for Southern Baptists). But a typical service will take the following form:

- (1) The call to worship, and greeting, and a time of fellowship opens the service.
- (2) The music minister and worship team lead the congregation in song.
- (3) Deacons circulate offering plates and receive the offering.
- (4) The pastor delivers a sermon.
- (5) The pastor gives an invitation to receive Christ as Savior, offers prayer for particular needs, or delivers some specific call to commitment.
- (6) The music minister/worship team lead the congregation in a closing hymn.
- (7) The pastor may offer remarks and close the service with a prayer/benediction.

¹³⁹ *The Baptist Faith and Message* is a statement adopted in 2000 by the Southern Baptist Convention. The statement was overwhelmingly passed. This fact strongly suggests that it reflects the typical view of Baptists (though particular Baptist churches are not required to endorse it).

¹⁴⁰ Beechmont Baptist Church was active in helping to establish *Hội Thánh Báp Tít Việt Nam* (the Vietnamese Baptist Church) in Louisville.

¹⁴¹ In his view, the main difference is the use of the Vietnamese language in lieu of English. He opined that Vietnamese services are more similar to those of his congregation than the services of the other ethnic congregations previously associated with their church.

The pastor estimates that average length of his sermons at about 30 minutes and that the entire service typically lasts an hour and ten minutes.

Services are conducted in the church's main sanctuary. Only the stained glass windows on the walls along the side of the sanctuary display any significant degree of symbolic representation.¹⁴² But even the dominant symbol of Protestant Christianity, the cross, was absent from the pulpit and the altar.

Beechmont Baptist Church uses the *Baptist Hymnal*¹⁴³ in addition to some popular praise and worship choruses. The goal is to provide a blended service (with both traditional hymns and contemporary worship songs). Though congregational singing is emphasized, the choir may occasionally sing alone.¹⁴⁴ Lyrics to the songs are usually displayed on a projector screen which may also display announcements, sermon outlines and sometimes images which are related to the theme of the service, the preaching, or the worship music.¹⁴⁵ No particular song is used in every service. Likewise, no particular song is used at any specific time in the service (for instance, following the offering, at the close of the service, etc.). Themes of songs used at Beechmont tend to be related to the theme of the sermon for that service – though a favorite theme is “the cross of Christ.”¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² For instance, the windows depict a Bible, a cross, a loaf of bread and a cup, and trumpets.

¹⁴³ Specifically, this is the hardcover *Baptist Hymnal* published by LifeWay Worship in 2008.

¹⁴⁴ At times, smaller groups such as quartets, trios, and duets may provide special music. However, there is a feeling among some in the congregation that solos draw too much attention to the individual. Thus, the singing of solos is infrequent. Songs are sung only in the English language and typically accompanied by the organ and/or piano; however, recorded soundtracks have also been used on some occasions.

¹⁴⁵ The pastor mentioned that he tries to avoid using the images which depict the face of Christ. He believes that many pictures of Christ represent Jesus as a European rather than as a young Jewish rabbi. Also, he believes that the absence of such images tends to preserve the “mystery of God” in worship.

¹⁴⁶ Traditional songs such as “Victory in Jesus” and the hymns of Fanny Crosby are congregational favorites.

When preaching, the pastor primarily uses and refers to the *New International Version* (NIV) and delivers his sermons in English only. Themes of sermons vary widely through the course of the year but most sermons communicate the “gospel message” which leads to an altar call at the end of the service. Older members of the congregation seem to favor these evangelistic messages but younger people prefer application-oriented sermons which address practical issues of life (sexuality, finances, etc).

Like most churches of their denomination, Beechmont Baptist Church practices the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Southern Baptist churches are autonomous and thus have great freedom in how they design their worship. Yet baptism is always performed by full immersion in water.¹⁴⁷ The autonomy principle allows freedom among individual churches as to actual baptismal practices (as long as the baptisms are always performed by immersion). The ordinance is viewed as an expression of faith in Christ and not part of salvation. Prior to baptism, the pastor is careful to explain its meaning to the new believer. Other than this, no instruction is provided prior to the act. Baptisms may be done whenever a new believer makes a profession of faith or when a professing Christian was baptized other than by immersion.¹⁴⁸

As with baptism, there are no established formal guidelines or written instructions for the Lord’s Supper. Normally, the church will celebrate the Lord’s Supper once per month – usually near the beginning of the service. Though the

¹⁴⁷ In addition to the pastor, others (such as a youth pastor or deacon) may perform baptisms.

¹⁴⁸ Occasionally, a Christian may be re-baptized even when the baptism was by immersion – if it was an “alien” immersion (for instance, a baptism by a non-Christian religious group). If the baptism was understood to have a different meaning than that which has been explained, it is viewed as an “alien” baptism.

deacons have never celebrated the Lord's Supper in the pastor's absence, the pastor believes it would be acceptable since they are considered to be ordained ministers in the Baptist churches. However, some deacons believe it is important to have the pastor present. When teaching about the Lord's Supper, the pastor might refer to John 6: 32-48 in which Jesus speaks of himself as the "bread of heaven." But more often, the passage in 1 Corinthians 11 is used because the phrase "in remembrance of me" clearly suggests the memorialist view of the Lord's Supper which is common among Southern Baptists.

Responsive readings are not often used except for special seasons such as Lent or Christmas. The reading is usually selected by the pastor or the music minister. Thus, its content is normally related in some way to either the pastor's sermon or to the music (or perhaps, to the general notion of worship).¹⁴⁹ Responsive readings are believed to provide opportunities for the congregation to participate more in the worship. However, they also function to focus the congregation's attention in worship.

Opportunities arise during most services for the confession of sin. Most commonly, this act would be in response to the invitation or "altar call" given near the close of each service. The confession of sin during an altar call might occur in the context of conversion or, less commonly, when seeking counseling.¹⁵⁰ The pastor indicated that Christians should "confess sin in the context of the sin." He means simply that private sin should be confessed

¹⁴⁹ If the reading is selected by the pastor, it will typically be related to the sermon's topic. If a reading is selected for use early in the service, it is likely to be related to the idea of worship. (The music minister might select, for instance, a reading from Psalm 100 or 103).

¹⁵⁰ Altar calls are sometimes given for other purposes such as an invitation for new congregants to join the church.

privately and public sin should be confessed publicly. No formal confessions of faith are recited in their services. In fact, Southern Baptists really have no formal confession of faith; even the use of baptismal creeds is usually avoided.¹⁵¹

Offerings are given as an act of worship either during or after the congregational singing¹⁵² and in thanksgiving for God's gifts. There is also a perceived stewardship responsibility associated with those gifts. Finally, congregants give in reverential fear of God – understanding that anyone may lose everything they have tomorrow. The offering is seen not as “paying God off” but as an expression of trust in God.

A number of special services are held each year at Beechmont Baptist Church. For example, on Christmas Eve, the church hosts a candlelight service. Sermons and music focus on the Incarnation. The pastor often refers to the account of Christ's birth in the first two chapters of Matthew - or less frequently, the second chapter of Luke. Special services are also held on and before Easter.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Congregants may give personal testimonies of their own experiences with God – testimonies which function as informal confessions of faith. Baptism, of course, also functions as a confession of faith.

¹⁵² Money is distributed to pay the church's staff, to support the Southern Baptist cooperative program and for local benevolence ministry.

¹⁵³ An Easter musical is held on each Palm Sunday. In addition, special services are provided on the Wednesday before the Easter service. These Wednesday evening services focus on the Passion of Christ and include a celebration of the Lord's Supper. Typically, the sermon may draw from a pericope which addresses atonement through the cross. At the Easter Sunday service, sermon topics center on the story of the resurrection and its meaning for humanity. Thus, the passion of the Christ is emphasized prior to Easter; yet the resurrection is the primary focus on Easter morning.

The Length of Services in Vietnamese Baptist Churches

One important difference in the worship of the Vietnamese Baptist Churches and their non-Vietnamese counterparts is the length of their church services (see Table 5).¹⁵⁴

| Church | Length of observed services | Avg. length of services |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Louisville | 66; 83 | 74.5 |
| Bowling Green | 103; 72 | 87.5 |
| Memphis | 114; 105 | 109.5 |
| | | |
| <i>Average (all services)</i> | | 94.5 |

Table 6. Average length of Vietnamese Baptist church services observed in the GOVR (in minutes).

The longest service observed was an hour and 54 minutes – almost three-quarters of an hour longer than the Beechmont Baptist services. But *why* are they longer? One important factor is the time allotted for proclamation (see Table 6).¹⁵⁵

| Church | Length of sermons | Avg. length of |
|----------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Louisville | 35; 31 | 33 |
| Bowling | 48; 44 | 46 |
| Memphis | 38; 43 | 40.5 |
| | | |
| <i>Average (all)</i> | | 39.8 |

Table 7. Average length of sermons in Vietnamese Baptist churches observed in the GOVR (in minutes).

¹⁵⁴ At Beechmont Baptist Church, for instance, the service is designed to last about an hour and ten minutes. Though the observed Vietnamese services in Louisville average only slightly more than this (1 hour, 14.5 minutes), the average for all observed Vietnamese Baptist churches in the GOVR is almost twenty-five minutes longer than the services at Beechmont Baptist Church.

¹⁵⁵ At Beechmont Baptist Church, the pastor averages 30 minutes for each of his sermons. However, the Vietnamese congregation in Louisville heard sermons averaging 33 minutes while the Bowling Green congregation heard sermons lasting an average of 46 minutes. This suggests that increased sermon lengths might often be the cause of longer services at these two churches. This also true of the services in Memphis where the Vietnamese sermons tend to be about forty minutes or so.

However, sermon length is not the only factor which extends the duration of services at the Memphis church.¹⁵⁶ Even after considering the difference in sermon length, the Memphis services average about a half hour longer. It turns out that the additional time is accounted for by the lengthy period allotted for prayer requests/prayer in the Memphis church's services. In those services, the average time spent on prayer requests/prayer during just one part of the service was 31 minutes!

Prayer

The practice of prayer in Vietnamese Baptist churches differs in certain ways from most other Baptist churches of the GOVR. Ti-mô-thê, a member of the Vietnamese Baptist Church in Memphis was careful to point out that Vietnamese congregants tend to pray more in a typical service than their non-Vietnamese counterparts. Indeed, the pastor at Beechmont Baptist only mentioned that prayer is offered during the altar call and at the close of the service. But at the Memphis church, prayer was offered *seven times* in each service - and a much greater amount of time was devoted to it. In Louisville's Vietnamese church, too, prayer occurred either six or seven times in each service. The regular season of prayer on "fifth Sunday" afternoons is another opportunity for a loosely-ordered time of prayer/fasting. Such regular prayer meetings may happen in English-speaking Baptist churches - but they tend to be shorter in duration than the five-hour period set aside for prayer in the Memphis church.

¹⁵⁶ The Memphis pastor preached sermons averaging about *ten* minutes longer than those at Beechmont Baptist - but the Memphis services averaged almost *forty* minutes longer than those at Beechmont.

This suggests a stronger emphasis on prayer in the Vietnamese Baptist churches than in other Baptist churches.

The Vietnamese Baptist churches in both Kentucky and Tennessee also share the same method of closing their prayers by praying in unison “*nhân danh Đức Chúa Jêsus-Christ, A-men.*”¹⁵⁷ Though this would not normally be done in English-speaking Baptist congregations, the practice is appropriate in the sense that Baptists commonly pray “in the name of Jesus” and the phrase is not likely to be confusing or misleading.¹⁵⁸

Also, the Memphis church’s *Tiệc Thánh* included a recitation of the Lord’s Prayer. This was the only example of the Lord’s Prayer being used in any of the Baptist services. It is not used at Beechmont Baptist Church in Louisville - nor is it used in Kentucky’s Vietnamese Baptist churches. Since this prayer comes directly from scripture, its content cannot be contradictory to Christian teaching. This is evident because *The Baptist Faith and Message* indicates that “Scripture is totally true and trustworthy.” Therefore the prayer practices of the Vietnamese Baptist churches are consistent with the Baptist principles – in spite of Ti-mô-thê’s comment that this way of using of Lord’s Prayer is “not part of the Baptist tradition.”

Praise

The relatively small Vietnamese Baptist congregation in Bowling Green sings *a capella*. However, their larger counterparts in Louisville and Memphis

¹⁵⁷ This practice is not common in other Baptist churches of this region, of course, but the practice is common in other Vietnamese Protestant churches – both in the United States and in Vietnam.

¹⁵⁸ Even though the word *chúa* has been associated with idols, *Chúa*’s association with the God of the Christians predates even its seventeenth-century use by Alexandre de Rhodes.

use soundtracks or live instrumentation to accompany their singing. In the Memphis church, traditional instruments including the monochord and certain Asian flutes may be used to make the music seem less foreign. In churches where traditional instruments are not used,¹⁵⁹ it is usually due to a lack of people trained to play them rather than a belief that such instruments are inappropriate (for instance, because of their association with another religion, etc). Yet some in the Memphis church have opposed the use of certain traditional instruments for exactly that reason.

At each of the Vietnamese Baptist churches, the congregational singing primarily uses songs from the *Thánh Ca* but occasionally songs are selected from a more contemporary genre. The contemporary music is typically a western song with a Vietnamese version of the original lyrics. Either of these strategies is reasonable as long as the meanings of the original lyrics have not been altered in a way which renders the content theologically unacceptable. In certain cases, the translation process can result in the production of new lyrics having a significantly different meaning than those of the original song. For instance, the hymn “Send the Light” has been used by western Christians for many years as a call to spread the gospel to the nations. However, in the course of translation into Vietnamese, this melody became a New Year’s song. It is now listed in the *Thánh Ca* as *Ngày Giờ Qua* (more literally translated as “Last Hour”). The original lyrics were evangelistic and missions-oriented as exemplified in the first verse:

¹⁵⁹ In the Louisville Vietnamese Baptist Church, for instance, the only instrument normally played during the services is piano. Most of the time soundtracks are used to accompany congregational singing.

Send the Light, the blessed gospel light;
Let it shine from shore to shore.
Send the Light, the blessed gospel light;
Let it shine forevermore.

The verse was given Vietnamese lyrics which dramatically altered the original meaning as follows:

Behold the new spring has come,
Welcomed by the bird's joyful song.
Together we live happily in glorious grace,
Wishing each song to be forever given.

Though *Ngày Giò Qua* does mention God (in its chorus), it does not refer to Christ, the cross, the gospel – or even light! The verses simply celebrate the passing of a year, the coming of spring and the beauty of a spring morning in God's creation. Thus its content is much less overtly Christian. Yet it is still quite compatible with a Christian worldview and appropriate for use in a celebration such as *Tết*.

Occasionally, a secular *cải lương* tune is sometimes re-written using Christian lyrics and performed in the Memphis church. The problem which arises in this case is similar to the problem connected to the use of traditional instrumentation. That is, some Vietnamese people associate the *cải lương* style with secular music; therefore, they disapprove of its use in the church. Conversely, other members enjoy the *cải lương* style and see no problem with its use in a church setting. However, in considering whether this reflects appropriate contextualization, the question is not whether the practice is offensive – but whether it is *unnecessarily* so. Is it a theological necessity to include *cải lương*-style music? Probably, it is not. On the other hand, what is the theological

message that we send by excluding it? Are we implying that certain styles of music are inherently evil and thus to be avoided? Possibly, we are. Are we restricting the power of Christ to redeem what the world has defiled? Probably not, since it would be reductionistic to assume that such an idea was the only possible reason for excluding it. But the final question is this: Would the exclusion of *cải lương*-style praise result in Christianity losing its “basic structure and identity”? Even if the straightforward *assertion* that an “inherently evil” style of music was deemed destructive of the basic structure and identity of Christianity, the mere *implication* of such a concept can not be.

Therefore we fail to find a theological necessity for the inclusion of *cải lương* in the worship services. Lacking a theological necessity, the offensiveness of the music indicates that its inclusion is an example of inappropriate contextualization. Even so, including *cải lương*-style music in worship can be an opportunity to teach Vietnamese Christians about the freedom we have in Christ. At any rate, the question of whether to include it or not is best left to the local congregation. This issue is discussed among the members of the church - and the congregation’s leadership is not convinced that the practice is so offensive that it should be disallowed. The Baptist principle of church autonomy stated in the *Baptist Faith and Message* indicates that these questions of style and instrumentation ought to be decided at the local church level – as long as the theological content of those songs is compatible with the Baptist point of view.

In the Memphis congregation, a Vietnamese congregant actually composes Christian songs in Vietnamese. These songs use Vietnamese musical

styles and are scored for traditional Vietnamese instruments. This is, by far, the best way to contextualize authentic expressions of Christianity in these churches since it allows the clearest use of the Vietnamese language with the traditional Vietnamese music. However, the proper blend of traditional versus contemporary styles used in the services should be flexible enough to allow for changes in the ratio of more recent immigrants to less recent immigrants (as well as second- and third-generation Vietnamese congregants). If Vietnamese immigrants continue to come to the United States in significant numbers, traditional style music with traditional instruments may be desirable. If not, a slow shift toward more contemporary music with western instrumentation would be preferred.

Confession of Sin

In each Vietnamese Baptist church, the congregants have two obvious opportunities to confess sin. In a typical service, the opportunity would arise during the altar call near the end of the service. This altar call is usually intended for non-Christians to make an initial confession of sin in conjunction with repentance and a prayer for salvation. The “honor/shame-based” orientation of Vietnamese culture tends to contra-indicate such public confessions. Yet the very fact that the practice is somewhat “countercultural” also implies that such confessions can demonstrate more clearly the sincerity of that person’s commitment to follow Christ.

Sins may also be confessed during the examination of conscience in preparation for the Lord’s Supper. In this case, the intention is to allow congregants share their daily struggles and failures with the Lord and ask for

God's help in overcoming them. *The Baptist Faith and Message* does not require such an examination of conscience but it is consistent with the logic of the article which addresses baptism and the Lord's Supper. That article requires baptism as a prerequisite to receiving the Lord's Supper – and baptism is spoken of as symbolizing the “believer's death to sin.” Thus the act of receiving the Lord's Supper with a consciousness of unrenounced sin could be construed as an act of dishonor toward the Body and the Blood of Christ.

The practices of the Vietnamese Baptist churches in Kentucky and Tennessee mirror those of most Baptist churches with respect to the confession of sin. This is true in both the phenomenological and semiotic senses. However, because of the honor/shame-orientation of Asian culture, the public confession of sin represents a more difficult challenge than for most Americans. This may be especially true for recently-immigrated Vietnamese who are under conviction and struggling to make an initial commitment to Christ. Yet the practice also represents an opportunity for a more transformative effect on the members of that culture.¹⁶⁰ Indeed, the ultimate impact of the practice could be that individuals of that culture may exhibit a greater witness to the power of Christ.

Confession of Faith

As with the Non-Vietnamese Baptist churches, none of the Vietnamese Baptist churches in this study recite formal confessions of faith or even baptismal creeds. Of course, congregants may explicitly confess faith in Christ during an

¹⁶⁰ This is what Ru-to suggests by saying that confession of sin is good because it breaks through that cultural attribute of their behavior.

altar call or by receiving baptism (or implicitly by participation in the Lord's Supper).

Again, the Vietnamese Baptist churches' practices (baptisms and altar calls) mirror those of other Baptist churches in terms of both the specific behaviors and their specific meaning(s). Baptisms are always by immersion and great care is taken to instruct the candidate as to its proper meaning. The way that the Vietnamese pastors and congregants understand baptism harmonizes well with baptism-related statements in the *Baptist Faith and Message* and with those made by the pastor at Beechmont Baptist Church in Louisville.

In fact, the act of baptism can have even deeper meaning within the Vietnamese community than among other Baptists. Often, it means the renunciation of family and ancestors in order to follow Christ. At any rate, such understandings are consistent with the Baptist view as presented in the *Baptist Faith and Message*.

Reading of Scripture

The scripture is read responsively in each of the Vietnamese Baptist churches in nearly every service. This practice is much more common in the Vietnamese Baptist churches than in other Baptist churches. For instance, Beechmont Baptist in Louisville normally uses responsive readings only on special occasions such as Lent or Christmas.¹⁶¹ Recently, only forty percent of Baptist churches indicated that they use responsive readings as much as once per month. Yet *all* of the Vietnamese Protestant churches in this study – *regardless*

¹⁶¹ Anecdotaly, it was intimated to me that the use of responsive readings was much more common in Baptist churches about 40 or 50 years ago.

of denominational affiliation - include responsive readings in the majority of their services.¹⁶²

Also, pericope of the sermon is read prior to the preaching of the sermon in each of the Vietnamese Baptist churches' services. Unlike the responsive reading, this practice is common in other Baptist churches. In the Vietnamese Baptist churches, both the responsive readings and the pericope readings function in the same ways as in other Baptist churches – with a notable exception. The Beechmont Baptist Church in Louisville uses responsive readings which may not be directly related to the sermon topic.¹⁶³

The meaning associated with each reading of scripture in the Vietnamese Baptist churches is also similar to that found among other Baptists. In both cases, the scripture readings remind congregants of Bible truths and focus the attention of the congregants on the sermon's topic. It is also apparent that the *Kinh Thánh* readings preceding the homily also lend a measure of credibility to the sermon. In all, the practices are similar to those of other Baptist churches and are consistent with the *Baptist Faith and Message*.

Preaching

The Vietnamese pastor of the Kentucky churches preaches sermons which draw from Vietnamese culture and immigrant experience. He preaches in an authoritative but gentle style and emphasizes the importance of good Bible

¹⁶² This phenomenon most likely is due to the influence of the CMA/ECVN church in Vietnam. Rev. Esther Dang indicated that CMA/ECVN church services always included such responsive readings.

¹⁶³ For instance, responsive readings selected by the music minister often relate to the concept of worship.

teaching (since his congregants may have less familiarity with scripture than congregants in other Baptist churches). Despite the strong teaching focus, his sermons do have an evangelistic thrust which urges listeners to receive Christ as Lord and Savior.

Similarly, the Vietnamese pastor in Memphis attempts to draw elements of Vietnamese culture and experience into his proclamation. As a former American soldier in Vietnam, some of his illustrations draw from wartime experiences. Because he was formerly a missionary, he may also refer to events that occurred in the refugee camps where he ministered. Though his understanding of Vietnamese language and culture may never equal that of the Vietnamese themselves, his deep familiarity with Christian teaching, biblical languages and experience (even his broader knowledge of other Bible translations) may actually help him to overcome some of the weaknesses of the Cadman translation when exegeting scripture.

As compared to the United Methodist churches, there seemed to be greater concern in Baptist churches for the preaching to be understood in English. This is particularly evident in the Memphis church; in their services, the sermons manifested either a high degree of code-switching or else audio equipment was made available to provide for an English translation of the service. Each of these attributes of the sermons reveals a recognition of the importance of communicating well not only with non-Vietnamese but also second- and third-generation Vietnamese who are typically more comfortable with English. This

evidences a regard for the changes which are taking place within the Vietnamese-American community.

When using elements of Vietnamese culture (proverbs, stories, etc), the pastors often found it necessary to add certain clarifying statements to insure that misleading connotations associated with those elements were not attached to the meaning of the sermon's point. For instance, in using the proverb "there's always a higher mountain" to preach concerning humility, Rev. Luc Hoang was careful to add that "God is the highest." Importantly, this eliminates one seriously unscriptural connotation of the proverb – that is, that something or someone may be higher than God! The inclusion of such an idea as this would be an obvious example of overcontextualization (syncretism). However, examples of such misuse of cultural elements appeared nowhere in the sermons associated with the Vietnamese Baptist churches of Kentucky and Tennessee. The sermons also manifested no unnecessarily offensive content.

The Lord's Supper

The Vietnamese Baptist churches practice the ordinance of *Tiệc Thánh* in much the same way that other Baptist churches celebrate the Lord's Supper. The behaviors executed during *Tiệc Thánh* (such as examination of conscience and prayer, partaking of the elements, etc.) are the same as might be found in other Baptist congregations. The use of bread and juice (referred to as "fruit of the vine") is also common for other Baptist churches - and consistent with statements in the *Baptist Faith and Message*. The meaning of baptism also parallels the standard Baptist perspective as articulated in the *Baptist Faith and Message*. The

pastors and congregants in the Vietnamese congregations of Kentucky and Tennessee uniformly speak of the ordinance as a remembrance of Christ's suffering. Likewise, the *Baptist Faith and Message* states that celebrants of the Lord's Supper "memorialize the death of the Redeemer and anticipate his second coming." The phrase which speaks of "anticipating his second coming" was not mentioned by the pastors or congregants. However, the pericope cited during the services of the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11: 23-34) does speak of showing the Lord's death "till he comes" – a statement which at least implicitly anticipates his coming.

In the Memphis church, it is clearly understood that the elements may only be received by baptized, professing Christians. In Louisville and Bowling Green, the situation is less clear. The pastor of the Kentucky churches stated that only professing Christians should participate in *Tiệc Thánh* – but added that they need *not* be baptized to do so. Conversely, the International Ministries Coordinator in Bowling Green indicated that *only* baptized Christians should receive the elements. In any event, the *Baptist Faith and Message* clearly states that baptism "is prerequisite to the privileges of church membership *and to the Lord's Supper*" (emphasis added). In the Vietnamese Baptist churches, there is often an extended time of instruction between an individual's profession of faith and baptism. It could be that this extended wait produces a tendency to allow professing Christians to receive the Lord's Supper – even though the individual has not yet been baptized. But such a practice would represent a significant departure from the typical Baptist perspective on the Lord's Supper.

If the *Baptist Faith and Message* is held to be descriptive of the “basic structure and identity of Christianity,” this departure from standard Baptist practice would appear to meet our definition of syncretism (“the mixing of elements of two religious systems to the point where Christianity loses its basic structure and identity”). However, there are several reasons why I do not agree with that assessment. First, syncretism involves the mixture of “two religious systems” – for instance Buddhism and Christianity or Confucianism and Christianity. This practice does not arise from a mixing of religious systems but rather from a pragmatic consideration of the believer’s understanding of Christian practice. Second, Baptists recognize other churches as authentically Christian, including some Christian denominations (for example, the United Methodists) which do not require baptism prior to receiving the Lord’s Supper. Moreover, not all Baptist churches are required to endorse the *Baptist Faith and Message*. For these reasons, all of the practices observed with respect to Lord’s Supper are acceptable in terms of being inoffensive to Vietnamese persons *and* being free of syncretism.

Offertory Collections

In the Vietnamese Baptist services in Louisville, offertory collections are received in a similar manner as they are in other Baptist churches. The offertory occurs following the greetings/announcement/prayer and the opening set of congregational songs.¹⁶⁴ After the offertory prayer, designated lay members receive the collection by passing offering plates among the congregation’s

¹⁶⁴ The Vietnamese Baptist churches nearly always insert a responsive reading prior to the offertory. But, of course, responsive readings are rarely used in other Baptist churches.

members. However, in the Memphis church, the process is a little different. First, a lay leader introduces the offertory. Second, the collection is received by passing offering bags (not plates) among the congregation as the worship team plays. The congregants remain seated until the last verse of the song. Then the congregation stands and sings the final verse of the song in unison. Also, in the Memphis services, a lay person prays an offertory prayer *after* the offering is received (with the congregation still standing). The process of receiving the collection is much simpler in the Bowling Green church. Individuals unceremoniously place their offering in an envelope on a table to the right of the pastor.

Statements in the *Baptist Faith and Message* primarily connect the meaning of the offering to the principle of stewardship. The pastor at Beechmont Baptist partially echoes this assertion when he speaks of the offering as an act associated with stewardship – but adds that it is also an act of worship and an expression of trust in God. In the Vietnamese churches, worshippers do speak of the offering as an act of worship but mostly they refer to the offering as an expression of thanksgiving for God’s goodness and as an act of obedience to God’s word. The theme of thanksgiving is not explicitly connected to the offering in the *Baptist Faith and Message* but it is certainly suggested by the phrase “God is the source of all blessings, temporal and spiritual; all that we have and are we owe to Him.” In an even more obvious way, the idea that giving is a response to God’s word is spelled out in the final sentence of the article quoted above: “According to the Scriptures, Christians should contribute of their means

cheerfully, regularly, systematically, proportionately and liberally” (emphasis added).

In the Bowling Green congregation, a potential problem arises with respect to the way that the offering is given (by simply placing the offering in a certain place). Though this is done in a manner similar to the Buddhist practice, congregants made it clear that the meaning or purpose behind their giving is completely different than the Buddhist meaning.¹⁶⁵ All things considered, the worship practices associated with the offertory collection are mostly the same as those in other Baptist churches. The *Baptist Faith and Message* does not condemn those practices that are different. Most importantly, the meaning associated with the giving and receiving of the offering is consistent with that articulated in the *Baptist Faith and Message* and in other Baptist churches.

Occasional Services

Each of the Vietnamese Baptist churches hold special services for the celebration of Easter, Thanksgiving, Christmas and lunar New Year (*Tết Nguyên-dan*). In Louisville, a solar New Year service is also observed. In addition, Mothers’ Day and Fathers’ Day services are held in both of the Kentucky churches. Mothers’ and Fathers’ Days are celebrated in a way similar to other Baptist churches. Though there may be a greater tendency to expand the emphasis to grandmothers and grandfathers, this notion is hardly absent in non-Vietnamese Baptist churches.

¹⁶⁵ For example, Ru-ơ said that Buddhists give money in the temple when they want something (guidance, protection or other help); but Christians give from a heart of thanksgiving for what God has already done for them. This different action-field context indicates a difference in the meaning of the act.

The celebrations of Christmas and Easter in the Vietnamese Baptist churches of Kentucky have much in common with those celebrations in other Baptist churches. Like other Baptist churches, themes of the sermons, readings and music frequently center on events related to the birth of Christ and the resurrection of Christ, respectively. However, some evidence suggests that congregants view the importance of these events in terms of reconciling the world to God (that is, restoring our relationship with God) rather than focusing on the western emphasis on justification (for instance, being freed from the penalty of sin).¹⁶⁶ But this difference in emphasis is not a departure from Christian teaching. Rather it is most likely a reflection of the importance of relationship to Asian sensibilities. Nevertheless, the theme of justification is ever present in the hymnody since the vast majority of *Thánh Ca* hymns have that western emphasis.

Philip Khanh Van Trinh notes that such an emphasis is a common aspect of Vietnamese soteriological perspective in the following statement:

To the Vietnamese culture, the consequences of sin are discord between the people and the spiritual realm, discord in social relations, discord between people and the environment, and discord within people themselves. Within this basic conception of discord, the consequences of sin may change with the changing context and time. The universality of discord is such that the proverb complains “without Trời, who could live together?” (Trinh 130).

But this cultural emphasis is consistent with the scriptural teaching that each of us has been reconciled to God – and to each other (Ephesians 2:11-21).¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ Consider, for instance, Ru-tô’s explanation of Christmas as a celebration of Jesus coming down to the earth to help us to know God, be mediator for us, and lead us out of sin. This is primarily the language of relationship rather than legal pardon.

¹⁶⁷ This passage exemplifies that reconciliation by the work of God in destroying the “wall of partition” between Jew and Gentile.

Moreover, the *Baptist Faith and Message* implies such a reconciliation when it speaks of God's grace bringing humanity into a "holy fellowship" with God.

Though the salient consequence of sin for Vietnamese Christians may be separation and disharmony between humanity and God, the cultural conceptions that traditional Vietnamese religionists associate with salvation have not necessarily been entrained in the Vietnamese Christians' cultural conceptions of sin. According to Trinh, the moral teachings of Confucius - and the Buddha's teaching concerning *samsara* - present punishment as the remedy to sin. Though this concept of sin resulting in punishment is present among Vietnamese Christians, it arises from their understanding of the Bible rather than Buddhist/Confucian sources.

Trinh also states that Vietnamese Buddhism suggests that good works - including the practice of *nhin* (enduring suffering) - are seen by Vietnamese people as a part of the solution for sin. But for the Vietnamese Baptists, good works and patient suffering are *not* accepted as a solution for the sin problem - at least not the ultimate solution. This is apparent from the sermon themes at Easter which emphasize that Jesus died for our sins - and perhaps most of all, by the invitation to receive Christ as Lord and Savior which normally appears at the close of each service.

The celebration of *Tết Nguyen-dan* occurs in each of the Vietnamese Baptist congregations. This service marks the greatest departure from typical Baptist worship for each of the Vietnamese churches. Yet there certainly are a considerable number of similarities to the standard Baptist service. In each

church, the *Tết* service is characterized by themes of “newness” or “new life,” and perhaps, a remembrance of the past year. Those non-Vietnamese Baptist churches which hold (solar) New Year’s services often use similar themes.¹⁶⁸ The most obvious and common departures, however, relate to the use of traditional Vietnamese dress, the presence of the *Tết* tree or “money tree,” and the distribution of *Tết* envelopes to congregants (particularly, children). The traditional dress is most frequently worn at *Tết* – though it may appear at Easter or Christmas as well. In terms of modesty and formality, this apparel is at least as appropriate as what might be seen in western-style Baptist churches on a given Sunday.

The *Tết* tree was not mentioned in the Bowling Green church. But the practice of giving away red envelopes of “lucky money” to the children was noted. In the Louisville church, the *Tết* tree does not appear until the end of the service; in Memphis, it stands at the front of the sanctuary throughout the service. The *Tết* tree is adorned with colorful flowers and red envelopes filled with “lucky money.” The flowers, of course, symbolize the “new life” associated with *Tết*. However, the fact that the money is “lucky” presents an issue in contextualization. Among congregants of these churches, it is widely recognized that the roots of the practice are found in Vietnamese superstition. But the pastor and congregants do not actually attach the idea of “luck” to the money at all. In a similar way, other Baptists might associate colored eggs with Easter. They may even be aware that

¹⁶⁸ The Louisville congregation conducts services which celebrate solar *and* lunar New Years. According to the pastor, his preaching topics tend to be the same for each type of New Year service. (The fact that both solar and lunar New Year’s services are held each year may be a reflection of the “in-between” nature of the Vietnamese immigrant’s subculture.)

this practice has its roots in the worship an ancient Babylonian fertility god – but for them the egg symbolizes “new life.” Of course, some Vietnamese may be more resistant to the introduction of practices with superstitious origins (as some Christians reject eggs and the Easter bunny). The Memphis church does not use “lucky money” at all. The tree is beautifully decorated with flowers and red envelopes – but the envelopes contain Bible verses in lieu of “lucky money.” While the use of “lucky money” may be allowable *as long as it carries no real religious meaning*, the use of Bible verses is probably more appropriate since it is free of even the connotation of “luck” and is more consistent with the *sola Scriptura* emphasis of Baptist churches.

CHAPTER 5

THE VIETNAMESE CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP OF KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE

The Vietnamese Protestant church in Knoxville is an independent congregation associated with the Evangelical Free Church of America (EFCA). It conducts its services in a room provided by a larger congregation, the Fellowship Evangelical Free Church of Knoxville (an EFCA church). This Vietnamese church, the *Hội Thánh Viet Nam* (Vietnamese Christian Fellowship) of Knoxville, Tennessee was established in 1997 by the current pastor, Reverend David Mai. He and his family started the church in his own house. They invited other members of the community to gather for meals and special occasions which included the singing of Vietnamese folk songs and the telling of Vietnamese stories. But after about a year, the congregation began regular meetings to share stories from the Bible along with prayer and the singing of Christian songs.

The pastor was born into a Christian family and had enrolled in a Bible school in Vietnam prior to serving in the army. Later, he finished college after coming to the United States in 1975. Following graduation from Toccoa Falls College in Georgia, he left for New Orleans Baptist Seminary where he earned the Master of Religion and Master of Divinity degrees and founded several churches in the New Orleans area. While he appreciates the formal education he has received and is thankful to have an understanding of the history of Christianity, the pastor also recognizes certain life experiences as important to his preparation

for ministry. Particularly, he values those experiences because they were opportunities for him to learn about practical issues of ministry from both laity and other clergy.

The Vietnamese Christian Fellowship of Knoxville was visited on August 2, 2009 and again on August 29, 2009.¹⁶⁹ The services were almost entirely in the Vietnamese language. All of the hymns were also given in Vietnamese only. Scripture readings were also from a Vietnamese translation. All hymns and choruses were projected onto a screen at the front of the room. For both of the services, the room was furnished with chairs for seating the congregation. Two tables at the front of the room supported the laptop, projector and speakers. The pastor wore a light-colored shirt and spoke without amplification from a lectern at the front of the room.

The August 2nd service proceeded as follows:

1. The pastor presented a greeting/welcome and announcements. This was entirely in Vietnamese except when he introduced me to the congregation.
2. Congregants stood and greeted one another.
3. The pastor led the congregation in an opening prayer.
4. The pastor led the congregation in reciting the Apostle's Creed in Vietnamese.
5. The lay leader led the congregation in singing *Danh Chúa Je-sus* ("The Name of Jesus") in Vietnamese only.
6. The lay leader led the congregation in singing *Hoan Ca Chúc Tôn Chúa*

¹⁶⁹ The normal weekly schedule of the church includes a Bible study beginning about 1:30 p.m. (EST). The Sunday worship service actually starts after the Bible study is finished (about 2:00 p.m.).

(“Celebrate Jesus, Celebrate”) in Vietnamese and English.

7. The lay leader led the congregation in singing *The Gặp Gờ Chúa Jesus* (“Meeting Jesus”) in Vietnamese.
8. The lay leader led the congregation (still seated) in singing *Có Ai Ngoài Jesus* (“There is None Like You”) in English and Vietnamese.
9. The lay leader led the congregation (now standing) in singing *Lời Tạ Ôn* (“Give Thanks”) in Vietnamese and English.
10. The lay leader led the congregation in prayer. The prayer ended with “*nhân danh Đức Chúa Jêsus-Christ, A-men.*”
11. The pastor led the congregation in a prayer.
12. The pastor led the congregation in reading Galatians 5: 22-26 in unison.
13. The pastor delivered a sermon, *Trái Của Thánh Linh* (“The Fruit of the Spirit”).
14. The pastor read 1 Corinthians 11: 23-29 and offered some remarks.
15. The pastor prays prior to the celebration of the *Tiệc Thánh*.
16. Congregants came by rows to receive the elements and returned to their seats.
17. The service of *Tiệc Thánh* ended with the pastor and congregants all partaking of the elements at the same time. The pastor prayed extemporaneously.
18. The pastor led the congregation in the Lord’s Prayer from Matthew 6: 9-13.
19. The service concluded with the congregation singing “Alleluia, Alleluia”

(to the tune of The Battle Hymn of the Republic). They sang only one verse.

In all, twenty congregants had gathered for worship that afternoon. The service lasted approximately one hour and fourteen minutes.

The August 30th service was different from the normal weekly service because it occurred on a “fifth Sunday.” For instance, it did not include a celebration of the Lord’s Supper or even a sermon. Instead testimonies were given by various members of the congregation. Each of these testimonies was followed by a period of prayer. The service also included different songs such as *Ánh Sáng Cho Đời* or “Light of the World,” *Chúa Sống* or “He Lives,” *Kia, Thần Yên-ùi Giáng-Lai* (“The Comforter Has Come”), *Tôi Dẫu Nhỏ* or “Even Though I Am Small,” and *Tôn Danh Cao Chúa* or “Glorify Thy Name.” The congregation also recited the Lord’s Prayer from Matthew 6: 9-13. The service closed with the congregation singing “Alleluia, Alleluia” (to the tune of “The Battle Hymn of the Republic”). For this service, a total of twenty-one congregants were in attendance. The service in its entirety lasted about an hour and thirty-four minutes. In addition to the observation of these services, the pastor and certain church members (identified here as An-ne, Ma-thê, Sa-mu-ên and Mi-ri-am¹⁷⁰)

¹⁷⁰ An-ne grew up in a Buddhist family but has been a Christian for a little more than a decade. She converted while still in Vietnam in 1998 but only arrived in the United States in 2000. Ma-thê went to a Catholic school as a youngster in Vietnam. Only later did she become a Christian about thirty-five years ago in refugee camp in Okinawa, Japan. She came to the United States with three children and suffered considerable difficulty finding employment. Eventually, she learned English and now pursues a career in drafting. She attended a Presbyterian church for a while but has been a member of the Vietnamese church in Knoxville for a little more than a year.

Sa-mu-ên came to the United States in 2004. He was a Christian in Vietnam and is from an ECVN church background. Sa-mu-ên has attended about five years and serves as the congregation’s assistant pastor. In Vietnam, he received instruction in a six-year program taught by a Bible professor from a seminary in Dallas. Sa-mu-ên also served there as a youth minister

were interviewed concerning the worship practices of their congregation.

Prayer

The two services observed at this church manifest some similarities with respect to the use of prayer. First, the pastor led the congregation in an opening prayer early in the service - some time shortly after the welcome and greetings. Second, the pastor or a lay person led the congregation in prayer at the end of the song service. Third, the pastor prayed prior to the reading of the sermon text in the first service and prior to the testimonies in the second service. Fourth, the pastor led the congregation in prayer near the end of the service. Fifth, each service ended with the pastor and congregation reciting the Lord's Prayer in unison (followed by the singing of final chorus). Regardless of which prayer was being offered or who was praying, the congregation always stood during the prayer and all prayers were offered in the Vietnamese language only. Also, whenever the congregation was led in prayer, the prayer concluded with the congregation and leader praying in unison "*nhân danh Đức Chúa Jê-sus-Christ, A-men.*"

and Bible study leader.

Mi-ri-am became a Christian after coming to United States. She knew no English, had no job or money, and was very sad. She had been a high school teacher in Vietnam but could not continue that career in this country because of her meager English skills. Eventually, someone suggested that she go to church. When she did, she learned about God and learned to love God. As she began to pray for help, God answered her prayers and began to provide for her needs. She confessed Christ as her Lord and Savior in March of 2009 and was baptized few months later in June. She now thinks that God is "very wonderful" and she is very thankful to Him. She has committed herself to serve God and has been a member of the Knoxville congregation for about a year.

The pastor indicates that he tries to place great emphasis on prayer.¹⁷¹ This emphasis is necessary because we are not able to do God's will without reliance upon God's guidance and strength. He also counts it a great privilege to pray to a God who you actually know.¹⁷² An-ne agrees with the pastor that prayer is very important because of our need for God's assistance. When she prays, she always asks for instruction and help from God. An-ne remembers the prayers in the Buddhist temples – the chanting, the drums, and the incense. She says the noise and smell sometimes bother other people and that it is an empty performance. But a Christian prays quietly from the heart – without all the noise of drums, perhaps even without speech.

Sa-mu-ên also stressed that prayer is very important – as important as breathing. He said that without prayer you become like a corpse (that is, spiritually lifeless - unable to do anything for God.) But prayer is different for the Christian than for other Vietnamese who may pray an idol or an ancestor. They pray at an altar or to an object. But the Christians need no idol or altar; the Christians need only to have their hearts and minds clear and to be ready to listen to God. Nevertheless, Sa-mu-ên appreciates the sincerity of their devotion - even though they do not know to whom they are praying.

Mi-ri-am said that when her congregation prays they offer thanksgiving to God and pray that God will bless people. She said that this is not done out of duty

¹⁷¹ At times, the pastor (or another church member) may hold prayer meetings in one of their homes.

¹⁷² In Vietnam, people set up altars every year during *Tết* and furnish them with fruit and incense. At midnight, they come out to pray to *Ông Trời*. According to Pastor Mai, they ask *Ông Trời* to bless them, to provide them with good jobs and to grant them good health in the next year. But the pastor says they are praying to a God that they do not know; however, Christians know their God.

or merely for ceremony but rather that the prayer springs from a relationship with God. Prayer strengthens that relationship when we share our joys or troubles with God.

Praise

Pre-recorded background music was used to accompany the congregational singing in both services. However, Sa-mu-ên mentioned that before they started using recorded music in this church, they used an organ in worship. Projection equipment was used during the service to provide the lyrics in lieu of hymnals.¹⁷³ While most hymns and choruses were taken from the Vietnamese *Thánh Ca* hymnal, *Thánh Ca tôn vinh Đức Chúa Trời*,¹⁷⁴ some¹⁷⁵ were introduced after being heard on local Christian radio. Though some songs were authored by Vietnamese people, most were written by westerners and translated into the Vietnamese language. The pastor explained that English lyrics are sung even when there are only Vietnamese people present because many of the younger folks are more comfortable with English.¹⁷⁶ The presence of the younger generation also impacts the style of music used. The congregation sings a blend of “traditional” and “contemporary” worship music. The pastor said that their goal is to have a 70-30 percent ratio of contemporary to traditional music.

Congregation members may provide special music on occasion in English or Vietnamese - or both. In the past, special music has included the use of

¹⁷³ Projection equipment was also used to provide the words to the Apostle’s Creed during its recitation.

¹⁷⁴ This is the version of the *Thánh Ca* used by ECVN churches in Vietnam.

¹⁷⁵ For instance, *Hoan Ca Chúc Tôn Chúa* (or “Celebrate Jesus, Celebrate,”) and *Có Ai Ngoài Jesus* (or “There is None Like You”).

¹⁷⁶ Yet only two congregational songs (*Hoan Ca Chúc Tôn Chúa* and *Có Ai Ngoài Jesus*) were sung in both Vietnamese and English; all other songs were in Vietnamese only.

western instruments such as drums, organ, and guitar.¹⁷⁷ The pastor would like to incorporate the use of traditional Vietnamese instruments into the services but there is no one available to play them at present. On special occasions – for instance, at the New Year – the services may include the use of pre-recorded traditional Vietnamese *cải lương*-style music.

Every service is closed with “Alleluia, Alleluia” (sung to tune of “The Battle Hymn of the Republic”). Other songs are often selected based on the themes of the sermon – or the service in general (for instance, baptism, communion, or *Tết*). According to the pastor, typical themes include the praising and honoring of God, the Trinity, and the goodness of God. Ma-thê added that the themes of God’s grace and love are also commonly found in their songs. The pastor’s favorite worship songs include *Khát Khao Dòng Nu’ớc* (“As the Deer”) and *Vinh Quang Rạng Ngời* (“Majesty”). He likes “As the Deer” because he wants to be thirsty for God; he likes “Majesty” because he believes that God alone should be our focus. Though An-ne prefers the contemporary worship music, she also likes more traditional songs from the *Thanh Ca* such as *Lòng Ước Mong* (“In His Time”). Other favorites include *Ơn Lạ Lùng* (“Amazing Grace”), *Một Ngày Tu’o’i Mới* (“This is the Day”) and *Thánh Chúa Thành Tín* (“Great Is Thy Faithfulness”).

The pastor is aware of the *đọc kinh* technique used for antiphonal chanting in Vietnamese Roman Catholic churches but it is not used in his congregation’s worship. A logical use of this technique in Protestant churches might be in the recitation of responsive readings, creeds, or perhaps the Lord’s Prayer. But the

¹⁷⁷ This is an ordinary acoustic guitar - not the modified “*ghi-ta*” (with a scalloped fret-board).

pastor prefers more personal expressions of faith (“from the heart”) to responsive readings.

The pastor added that music is important to prepare the heart for worship. Also, he believes that music helps you to remember things more than mere speech; it gets the words and meanings deep into the heart, not just the mind.

Confession of Sin

According to pastor, a portion of the service is set aside specifically for confession of sin when the Holy Spirit leads – often near the end of the service and in response to the sermon. In addition, such confessions may be made during the services of Holy Communion. These times are understood by the pastor to be important for two reasons. First, unconfessed sin is seen as a hindrance to proper fellowship with God. Second, the confession of sin must be done properly in order to receive freedom to live righteously as God expects from us.

The pastor believes that Vietnamese culture affects the practice of confessing sin. He said that some Vietnamese (especially older Vietnamese persons) are more reluctant to admit when they have done something wrong and actually respond to an invitation to “confess sin.” Instead, they will come to a pastor or a trusted friend to “seek advice” about a certain matter. In the process of asking for advice, they will mention that they did something wrong and perhaps even ask forgiveness. So the response may be functionally similar to confession of sin but the process is likely to be less public. Ma-thê, for instance, sees the confession of sin at church as a time to reflect on the scriptural teaching and pray

to God for guidance and help. However, she also indicated that she is more likely to confess her sins privately at home.

Confession of Faith

Sometimes, people may spontaneously offer a testimony of their faith during the service. However, specific times in the service are reserved for corporate confessions of faith as well (for instance, recitations of the Apostle's Creed). Whether the confessions of faith are individual or corporate, they normally occur prior to the singing. A number of different purposes or meanings were proposed by interviewees with respect to the confession of the Apostle's Creed. Ma-thê said that when the Apostle's Creed is recited she is reminded of what Jesus did for her on the cross.

Mi-ri-am said that confessions of faith are for focusing our thoughts on Christian teaching concerning what God has done for us and affirming our desire to believe that teaching. For Sa-mu-ên, such confessions of faith are times for recommitting yourself to what you say that you believe. In addition, they serve to help weaker believers that may be present to better know what Christians should believe. Finally, confessions of faith are simply an opportunity to testify to world what you believe.

Baptism is also a way of confessing the faith. The pastor said that he considers baptism to be a sacrament. Only the pastor administers baptism – and only by immersion. The congregation does not practice infant baptism – but baby dedications may be performed instead. For baby dedications, the pastor may use a passage such as Mark 10: 15 which speaks of receiving the kingdom of God “as

a little child.” The pastor believes that a baptized person is declaring a death of self and a subsequent resurrection with Christ. The person is also committing to be a follower Christ and to declare the gospel. An-ne and Mi-ri-am agreed that baptism is a very important part of Christian life. For them, baptism symbolizes new life with God. Ma-thê said specifically that baptism symbolizes the death and resurrection of Christ which allows her to have that new life. Mi-ri-am said that when she was being baptized she thought about dying with Jesus and rising to that new life. She also said it was “like Independence Day” because the new life also meant new freedom. Also, this new life meant a new relationship with God. She now sees God as “like my mother, my father, and my friend.”

Mi-ri-am believes that Vietnamese culture may affect the way some church members understand baptism. She shared the following story from Vietnamese tradition concerning an ancient ambassador to China. During one of the many periods of Vietnam’s domination by the Chinese,¹⁷⁸ an ambassador was sent to China for negotiation. Upon receiving the ambassador, the ruler of China decided to create a pretext for killing the man. The king prepared a feast for the ambassador and invited him to come at the appropriate hour. However, the only food offered to the ambassador was the head of a man. The king demanded that he eat the human head. To refuse was to dishonor the king – a crime punishable by death. Eventually, the man ate. But the king decided to kill him anyway by tying him underneath a bridge. According to the plan, the water should have risen by the next day and drowned the man. But after three days, the water never rose

¹⁷⁸ The pastor suggested that the story may have taken place during the Chinese Ming dynasty (in the fifteenth century).

above the level of the ambassador's mouth - and so the man was released. The moral of this story is that Heaven acted to save the righteous man from the deadly waters. According to Mi-ri-am, some Vietnamese associate this story with baptism - the point being that God has saved them from death, too.

Also, Mi-ri-am said that people in Vietnam often bathe and wash their clothes in the river. Thus it is easy to relate baptism to the washing away of filth or "unworthiness." The pastor said that this cleansing washes away both guilt and shame.

Reading of Scripture

In the August 2nd service, the *Kinh Thánh* was read by the pastor and the entire congregation in unison. The pericope was also read prior to the homily. This is normally done in every service and may be led by different lay members. All readings were from a Vietnamese translation (again, the *Kinh Thánh Cựu Ước và Tân Ước*). The pastor indicated that responsive readings are sometimes done as well. An-ne says responsive readings are sometimes like a question being posed by the leader and answered by the congregation. But in answering, the congregation is also affirming their willingness to act in accordance with their answer. When the *Kinh Thánh* is simply read to the congregation (as before the sermon), she says that this is an opportunity to confirm their faith and that it "gets every one on the same page."

Ma-thê said the reading of the *Kinh Thánh* (responsively or not) is important because if we keep God's word in our hearts we will not sin. She also mentioned that the reading prior to the sermon lets the congregation know the

passage from which the pastor will preach. Sa-mu-ên added that even a responsive reading (as well as the reading prior to the sermon) often relates to topic of sermon – and that its reading unifies the focus of the church on the sermon’s topic.¹⁷⁹ Mi-ri-am described *Kinh Thánh* readings as a way of “talking together to remember the work of God” and agrees that they unify focus of the people. She also believes that they function as a reminder to read the Bible.

Preaching

As we have seen in the other churches, the sermon topic sets the tone for the worship. It tends to act as a sort of thematic center-point from which the other components of the service (songs, *Kinh Thánh* readings, etc.) extend. Additionally, the sermon is likely to influence even the content of individual prayers offered during the worship service. Ma-thê mentioned that frequently recurring themes include: “Who is God?”, “the love of God” and “the grace of God.” An-ne indicated that she would enjoy hearing more sermons about faith. Mi-ri-am likes preaching that tells the story of Jesus’ life. She also wants to know how to be closer to God and live in a way that pleases God.

The sermon given in the August 2nd service was delivered entirely in the Vietnamese language – in accordance with Reverend Mai’s usual practice.¹⁸⁰ However, the pastor indicated that at least sometimes explanatory comments are given in English - even if there are no non-Vietnamese present. On the rare

¹⁷⁹ Sa-mu-ên also mentioned that a part of the responsive reading may sometimes be used as a memory verse for the week.

¹⁸⁰ During his sermons, the pastor primarily quotes from Vietnamese versions of the Bible. The principal text is a revised Cadman translation because it is more readily available in the United States. But he sometimes refers to a newer 2003 version of the *Kinh Thánh*. On rare occasions he may read from an English translation and - or even refer to a Greek New Testament text.

occasions when this is done, the goal is to communicate better to the younger congregants. Sa-mu-ên also preaches to this congregation from time to time. However, when he does so, he preaches only in Vietnamese. The text for the August 2nd sermon was Galatians 5: 22-26. Main points of the sermon were: (1) Christians should cultivate the fruit of the Holy Spirit. (2) The fruit includes: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, temperance, and faith. (3) The Holy Spirit works to produce this fruit. (4) You must cooperate with His work. (5) When the fruit becomes mature, it will be apparent to others. In preaching this sermon, the pastor referred to an incident that he experienced when arriving in Vietnam. He was approached by five police officers who initially greeted him in friendly manner. However, after he showed them his passport, they threatened to keep it unless he paid them some money. The pastor used this story to exemplify the absence of the fruit of goodness in the hearts of the corrupt officers.

Pastor Mai said that the Vietnamese concept of God centers on punishment. The idea of a loving, caring God is foreign. Among the Vietnamese, *Ông Trời* is watching every moment and waiting for you to make some mistake so that he can punish you. In his preaching, he tries to present mercy as an attribute of God as well as justice.

The pastor draws from Vietnamese proverbs in his preaching. For instance, there is the proverb that says “If you eat the fruit, remember the origin.” The “origin” is usually interpreted as the parent. Thus “remembering” implies being thankful for what your parents/ancestors have provided for you. But in his

sermon, he asks the question, “Who was the source of blessings to your parents?” The answer, of course, is that your parents’ blessings were given by God. Thus, you should also be thankful to Him. Vietnamese culture may also influence the content of a sermon through the use of stories, folk songs, folklore, or idioms.¹⁸¹ Sa-mu-ên said that these cultural elements are used to make the points of a sermon clear for the people. An-ne cited the following example of the use of a proverb: “When the parents were alive, you didn’t give them food. But when they’ve died, you make food for the flies [to enjoy].” The point of this expression is that children should treat their parents well while they are alive rather than making pretentious gestures after their deaths. Sa-mu-ên cited another proverb which addresses a child’s relationship to parents: “If the fish doesn’t eat the salt, it will rot away and if the child doesn’t eat the parent’s words, it will rot away.” The proverb declares the necessity of heeding the teachings of a parent. The pastor said that either of these proverbs might be used in a sermon touching on the commandment to honor parents.

The Lord’s Supper

Tiệc Thánh is now normally celebrated on the first Sunday of every month. No formal written liturgy is used for *Tiệc Thánh*. In the August 2nd service, the celebration of the *Tiệc Thánh* began after the sermon with the pastor reading 1 Corinthians 11: 23-29. The pastor explained that the bread represented the body of Christ which was broken for us. A layperson prayed prior to the

¹⁸¹ While Ma-thê agreed that Vietnamese proverbs or poems may be used in the sermons, she thinks that the pastor may avoid using some Confucian proverbs to avoid misleading some new members. However, she was unable to provide an example of such a proverb.

distribution of the elements. Congregants then came forward by rows and received the elements, dipping the wafers into a common cup. Some congregants consumed the elements there. Afterward, they returned to their seats. The pastor explained that the juice represented the blood of Jesus which was shed for us. The celebration of *Tiệc Thánh* continued with the pastor and some congregants partaking of the elements together and ended with a pastoral prayer.

The interviewees were largely consistent in their responses concerning the meaning of *Tiệc Thánh* and the symbolism of the elements. For instance, Mi-ri-am and An-ne view *Tiệc Thánh* as a time of remembrance of - and thankfulness for – Christ’s sacrifice. For An-ne, Sa-mu-ên, and Mi-ri-am, the bread and the cup respectively represent the body and blood of Christ. The pastor agreed and said that he recognizes the Lord’s Supper as a sacrament and not merely an ordinance. Any baptized Christian may partake of the elements. The pastor, too, said that the Lord’s Supper is a symbol of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross for us. However, Rev. Mai also added that Vietnamese culture may affect the way that some church members think about the meaning of Holy Communion. For instance, it is common for Vietnamese folk to gather to remember their forefathers (that is, the good things that they did and their contribution to the family). The pastor views the Lord’s Supper similarly, in that we remember what God did for us.

The pastor said that, for some members, Jesus is seen as a “spiritual ancestor” and progenitor of the family of God. This idea also impacts some congregants’ views toward *Tiệc Thánh*. For instance, Mi-ri-am mentioned that a

Vietnamese man who wants to be adopted into a family will add a drop of his blood into a cup of liquor.¹⁸² Upon drinking together, the family “adopts” the participant as a new “brother.” The implication is that the new family member has agreed to be bound to the family. There are now obligations to trust and protect one another as family members – and possibly even ritual obligations. Mi-ri-am said that this tradition is connected with how Vietnamese see our relationship with Christ – that is, that they must be faithful to him and trust him.

Offertory Collections

Offertory collections are not normally received at a specific time during the weekly service. Instead, a collection box is placed at the front door and church members are encouraged to give whenever they like (before, during or after the service). The pastor prefers this to the passing of an offering plate. He said that God wants us to give freely as we have received freely. He believes that this method allows members to give more freely than if the offering plate was passed. However, a specific time is designated for the offertory prayer.¹⁸³ The offering is used to provide for the material needs of the congregation and those to whom they are ministering.

The pastor clearly stated that he views the offering as an act of worship. Also, he believes that “when you give an offering, you give of yourself.” Along with the monetary gift that is presented in the offering, the worshippers also

¹⁸² Each family member adds a drop of their blood as well. Wine may be used upon occasion - making the resemblance to Holy Communion even more obvious. However, it is more common to use whatever alcoholic drink is readily available.

¹⁸³ The offertory prayer is prayed after the singing and typically asks that God multiply the blessings that come through the offering gifts.

present themselves to God for service. In the pastor's words, "We don't just give money but also our whole lives." An-ne sees the purpose of the offering as being for the ministry of the church – with particular emphasis on the needs of the poor. She also mentioned that it is important to give in order to honor God because "if you do for them, you do for Christ." Ma-thê spoke of the offering in terms of thankfulness. Because she acknowledges that everything (money, job, *et al*) comes from God, she sees the offering as an opportunity give a portion back to God as an act of thanksgiving. Like Ma-thê, Sa-mu-ên sees the importance of the offering as an expression of gratitude to God but he points out that God does not really need our offering. Mi-ri-am said that giving "reveals your heart to God."

Occasional Services

A number of special services are held on certain dates on both the solar and lunar calendars. Among these dates are New Year's Days (both the lunar and solar versions), Easter, Vietnamese Memorial Day (April 30), Thanksgiving, Christmas.

In Vietnam, the annual *Tết* celebration involves (for non-Christians) the preparation of an ancestral altar and subsequent midnight prayer for prosperity in the coming year. Businesses are normally closed for a week to ten days and the time is marked by visiting others and performances of various traditional dramas and songs. In the United States, the celebration is much less extreme in that businesses close for shorter periods. Nevertheless, there may be celebrations marked by traditional dramas and songs (though the dramas and non-Christian songs would not be found in worship services). Mi-ri-am said that it is important

for the congregation to observe *Tết*. Failure to do so would be likely to alienate others in the Vietnamese community.

The congregation also observes another New Year's Day - coinciding with the *solar* calendar. The order of service is very similar to that of the solar New Year. In these services, the congregation typically sings "New Year's songs" - such as *Xuân Về* and *Chào Mùa Xuân Sang*. Prayers of thanksgiving are offered for the blessings of previous year along with petitions for renewed blessings in the year to come. Sermons focus on God's faithfulness in the past and on hopes for the new year. Members invite other Vietnamese in the community to come to the service. However, during the services associated with the lunar New Year, the song leader will select more songs written by Christian Vietnamese folk for *Tết* - such as *Tôn Vinh*, *Ca Khúc Tạ Ôn*¹⁸⁴ and *Sức Sống*.¹⁸⁵

At the Easter service, sermons are built on themes such as the death and resurrection of Christ. These are echoed in the other elements of the service (the songs, readings, etc.). Easter services may have a more evangelistic flavor, too, since the sermons are based on themes directly relating to salvation through the sacrifice of Christ.

Around April 30 of each year, the church celebrates a Vietnamese Memorial Day service.¹⁸⁶ This is a time of remembrance of the overthrow of the South Vietnamese government. The services are characterized by prayer for people who were lost or left behind. The congregation prays for freedom in their

¹⁸⁴ *Tôn Vinh* and *Ca Khúc Tạ Ôn* were composed by an imprisoned Vietnamese Christian, Vũ Đức Nghiêm.

¹⁸⁵ *Sức Sống* is sung to the tune of a traditional Jorai folk song.

¹⁸⁶ The fall of Saigon to Communist forces occurred on April 30, 1975.

homeland, too - particularly, freedom of the press, freedom of speech and freedom of religion.¹⁸⁷ They also may pray for those who have suffered in other ways due to the war (for example, those with medical needs due to injury or those with family members in prison).

Conversely, Thanksgiving Day services are times to emphasize thankfulness to God for those who were able escape. In these services, testimonies of the faithfulness of God through severe adversity are common (as in the 5th Sunday services). For example, experiences of “boat people” who were adrift for months facing death from starvation or dehydration may be recounted – or perils due to the weather or pirates. Though the dead may be remembered, the main focus is on celebrating God’s faithfulness to the living.

At Christmas time, a small tree may appear in the sanctuary - decorated in much the same way as it would be in most Christian homes. Mi-ri-am said that Vietnamese people in the community become curious around these times and are perhaps more likely to accept invitations to come to church.¹⁸⁸

An Analysis of Vietnamese Christian Fellowship Worship

Though the Vietnamese Christian Fellowship in Knoxville (VCF) is an independent congregation, it is associated with the Evangelical Free Church of

¹⁸⁷ Communist repression of religion has greatly decreased in recent years; yet some regions still lack any significant religious freedom - often due to actions of local authorities rather than the national government.

¹⁸⁸ Their curiosity is aroused because of what they see in stores, on television, etc - so they want to understand what Christmas really is. What they see outside the church often fails to authentically reflect the Christian meaning of Christmas - so the congregation tries to avoid the use of symbols, themes, and songs which they believe are less truly Christian in character (such as Santa Claus). For the same reason, references to the Easter bunny are avoided during the Easter season. The avoidance of these symbols, themes, and songs allows them to present more authentically the Christian meaning of each holiday.

America (EFCA) and its services are held in a room provided the Fellowship Evangelical Free Church of Knoxville (an EFCA church).¹⁸⁹ The EFCA has no prescribed order of worship. However, the Fellowship Evangelical Free Church of Knoxville, Tennessee (Fellowship Church) has published a statement of faith, *The Doctrinal Statement of Fellowship Evangelical Free Church* (see Appendix IV). This statement of faith provides some basis for comparing the worship practices and associated doctrinal perspectives of VCF congregants to those of Fellowship Church. The church has continued to stay contemporary with respect to its worship music but has not wholly abandoned its traditional heritage or forms. Its services may employ traditional hymns and there is some use of liturgy. Though sermon topics are not governed by the lectionary, they are influenced by the church calendar. The most important influences on the worship are the Lead Pastor¹⁹⁰ and the Pastor of Worship and Music.¹⁹¹

As with the Baptist churches, the independent and autonomous nature of EFCA churches results in great diversity with respect to their worship practices. Thus, Fellowship Church is not required to conform to a specific order of worship. A typical service will take this form:

¹⁸⁹ The Evangelical Free Church of America is an association of autonomous congregations and church plants which are distributed around the world. It was created by the merger of the (Swedish) Evangelical Free Church of America and the Norwegian-Danish Evangelical Free Church Association.¹⁸⁹ The membership of these churches is dedicated to the preaching of the gospel and committed to a view of the Scriptures as the inspired and inerrant Word of God authoritative and sufficient. Church government is in the hands of each independent congregation.

¹⁹⁰ Reverend Rick Dunn has served Fellowship Church as Lead Pastor since 2002. At that time, he had already been active for 18 years in youth and family ministry, campus ministry, and as a professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Rev. Dunn has been a conference/retreat speaker as well. He holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from Bryan College and Master of Arts and Doctor of Education degrees from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Pastor Dunn authored a book on youth ministry and was a contributor to the Life Application Bible.

¹⁹¹ The Pastor of Worship and Music, Reverend Michael Cates, has undergraduate and graduate degrees in Music and Church Music, respectively, as well as a seminary degree in Sacred Music. He has served local churches in five states for almost 30 years as a Worship and Music Pastor.

- (1) The music minister and worship team lead the congregation in two songs.
- (2) The “welcome and mention” (may include announcements and an opportunity for congregation members to greet one another) is given.
- (3) A baby dedication or baptism (if scheduled) will be performed.
- (4) The music minister and worship team lead the congregation in three songs.
- (5) The deacons circulate offering plates and receive the offering while music is played. The offertory prayer is prayed.
- (6) The pastor delivers a sermon.¹⁹²
- (7) The pastor leads the congregation in a closing prayer.
- (8) The music minister and worship team lead the congregation in a closing song.
- (9) In every service, the pastor gives an invitation to receive Christ as Savior, to receive prayer for particular needs, or to answer a specific call to commitment.

Fellowship Church does not use hymnals or worship books. The lyrics required for their worship services are projected on two large screens on either side of the platform at the front of the sanctuary. The congregation’s worship is led by a worship leader (who usually plays guitar or keyboard/piano) and accompanied by as drums, electric and acoustic guitars, bass, and background singers. The emphasis is on congregational singing so special music is occurs only rarely. However, on special occasions, accompaniment may include a string section, a brass section, woodwinds, and additional percussion as well. The overwhelming

¹⁹² A passage from the Bible may be read at the beginning or inserted anywhere in the body of the sermon.

majority of the singing is in English – though some songs include verses in Spanish. Music styles range from rock and pop (including acoustic pop and alternative), to more traditional/hymnic and even Celtic styles. Themes are focused on the person of Christ, the atonement, and the gospel message, including sin, justification, grace and redemption. There is no standard order or placement of songs in the worship service. Each service is planned in way that relates to theme of that week’s sermon/teaching - or theme of the day (Easter, Christmas, *et al*). The preaching heard by Fellowship Church usually refers to *English Standard Version* (ESV) or the *New International Version* (NIV). Sermons are offered in English only.¹⁹³

The congregation practices the ordinances of baptism and communion. Baptism is reserved for those who have made a commitment to Christ (thus infant baptism is not practiced). Baptism is viewed as a symbol of the person dying to the old life and being raised in the new life of Christ. It is an outward expression of an inward experience.¹⁹⁴ Communion services are celebrated on the first Sunday of each month and usually feature a gospel-centered sermon. This ordinance is for Christian believers only. The bread and wine symbolize Christ’s body broken for us and his blood shed for us.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹³ Proclamation is often planned in terms of topical series (often two to four weeks in length) which explore “core values”: Worship, Growth, Service, or Investing. Alternatively, exegetical series may be offered which explore specific books of the Bible. These series may continue for months or even years.

¹⁹⁴ Baptisms are normally performed every other month in their morning services. The person shares briefly how he came to Christ, and then a pastor, parent, spouse, or friend baptizes them. Because Fellowship Church sees each member of their body as a minister (reflecting their understanding of the priesthood of all believers), any person influential in a mentoring role can baptize another believer.

¹⁹⁵ The congregation disperses to tables which are located at five strategically places in the worship center. At each table, congregants are served by an elder and that elder’s spouse. At

Portions of the worship service are infrequently set aside for responsive readings.¹⁹⁶ However, such readings are not a regular feature in their services, so there is no pattern or priority of theme. They are primarily used to express eternal truth and/or one's resolve for deeper consecration to Christ. In addition to responsive readings, the scripture is normally read prior to the sermon by the preacher for that particular service. The worship pastor commented that Bible "is God-breathed, and as such, has authority over each Christ-follower's life. The reading of the Scriptures is God's voice, and carries the authority of God Himself."

Confessions of sin usually occur at the first-Sunday observance of Communion during a time of examination, repentance, cleansing, and forgiveness. At that time, congregants are asked to search their hearts before taking the elements. Sins are confessed when they are revealed by the Holy Spirit to each believer; they are confessed by the believer directly to God; no intermediary or priest is necessary. Occasionally, a portion of the service may be set aside for confessions of faith. Perhaps two to four times a year, they would share in a confession or creed.¹⁹⁷ The worship pastor sees such confessions of faith as affirmations of the great truths that orthodox Christianity shared among various denominations and churches – that is, the essentials of the Christian faith.

more intimate gatherings, the table and elements may be made available so that a person can serve her/himself.

¹⁹⁶ They could be used as calls to worship or sermon preludes; at times, these readings occur in conjunction with the congregational singing. They may be led by a worship pastor, pastor, a member/singer on the worship team, or an elder. These responsive readings may relate creeds, Bible verses, doctrinal principles or thematic elements such as the body of Christ, the love of God, an affirmation to serve Him, etc.

¹⁹⁷ These are usually done responsively and led by a worship leader or pastor.

Prayer may be offered at various times during the service – usually by worship leaders or teaching pastors. The Worship Pastor notes the following purposes for prayer: to exalt Christ; to call others to Christ; and to offer praise, adoration, and confession to God on behalf of the whole congregation. Also, times of personal prayer are occasionally provided during the service. These are quiet moments for personal reflection, adoration, confession, thanksgiving and perhaps petition to God.

The collection is received at each service prior to the sermon/teaching. Offering bags are circulated through the congregation while the praise and worship team plays. The bags are collected by the ushers and an offertory prayer is prayed. The worship pastor describes the offering as an act of worship which symbolizes the giving of all we are and all we have to the Source of all things, that is, God.

Special services are held on Good Friday, Easter, and Christmas.¹⁹⁸ Easter services reflect on the transforming power of Christ's death and resurrection; Christmas services focus on the miracle of Christ's incarnation. Scripture texts for these services follow the theme of the service.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁸ In addition, special evening services of worship and prayer are scheduled monthly typically on the first or second Sunday evening of the month. The evenings of worship and prayer are designed to provide opportunity to reflect on what God is doing or speaking to the individual believer in any given month.

¹⁹⁹ Occasionally, such services may employ additional forms of artistic expression such as drama or dance. The worship pastor indicated that he values all forms of artistic expression as long as they are used with excellence and point to "the Master Creator and Artist" – as opposed to "art for art's sake."

The Length of Services at the Vietnamese Christian Fellowship

The difference between the lengths of the worship services at VCF and those of Fellowship Church was not as significant as the differences between the other Vietnamese churches and their non-Vietnamese counterparts.²⁰⁰ The time allotted for sermons in each church was found to be similar as well.²⁰¹

Prayer

In the Vietnamese Christian Fellowship, the practice of prayer is more structured than in Fellowship Church. In Fellowship Church's services, according to the worship pastor, prayer "occurs at various times" – though it is common for the teaching pastors to close their sermons with prayer. However, there are specific times in VCF's services which are set aside for prayer (the opening of the service, following the congregational singing, *et al*). Also, the Lord's Prayer is normally used at the close of VCF's services but it is never used that way in the services at Fellowship Church. Finally, the VCF congregation always stood during prayer and always closed each prayer by praying in unison "*nhân danh Đức Chúa Jêsus-Christ, A-men.*" The practice of closing prayers in this manner (that is, with similar English words prayed in unison) was not found in Fellowship Church – or in other EFCA churches. However, the practice is appropriate since

²⁰⁰ The duration of the services at Fellowship Church (about 75 minutes) compares well with the duration of a typical service at VCF (about 74 minutes). The August 30 service at VCF was much longer (94 minutes) but it was not a typical service. Fifth Sunday services have no preaching but congregants are given the opportunity to offer testimonies. Often, those testimonies are much longer than the time allotted by the pastor for a sermon. Therefore, they will often be very different in length. (Sermon duration average at Fellowship Church was based on samples from ten worship services held from March 7 through May 2, 2010. The duration of a typical service was estimated by April Cyr, the Worship and Communications Administrative Assistant at Fellowship Church.)

²⁰¹ The sermons at Fellowship Church averaged 37.3 minutes while pastor at VCF preached about 33.8 minutes – a difference of less than five minutes.

many Christians commonly pray “in the name of Jesus” and the phrase is not likely to be confusing or misleading.²⁰² It is more obviously appropriate since the *Doctrinal Statement of Fellowship Evangelical Free Church* asserts that all who come to the Father must do so “through Jesus Christ.”

Aside from the issue of when the church prays, there are other differences in the way that they approach the practice of prayer. Yet the differences primarily concern the emphasis that each church has with respect to the meaning of prayer. The purposes of prayer for VCF congregants tended to center more on petitioning God for strength and guidance while prayer at Fellowship Church emphasizes adoration of Christ, reflection/confession, and petitions that others would be drawn to Christ. Neither congregation would say that the other’s emphasis is unimportant. It seems only natural and appropriate that the adversity inherent in the experiences of many Vietnamese immigrants would tend to produce an emphasis on petitioning God for assistance. In that sense, one might say that VCF’s approach to prayer reflects an emphasis on petition which applies the practice of prayer in a more focused way to the context of Vietnamese immigrant experience. At any rate, all of these emphases are certainly well within the bounds of what might found among Christian believers in general – and among EFCA church congregants in particular. Moreover, the differences in practice we have discussed in this section are obviously allowable under the autonomy principle.

²⁰² This issue of clarity in this phrase was previously discussed in Chapter 4B (in the section on prayer).

Like the other Vietnamese churches in this study, the practice of public prayer among VCF congregants is free of syncretism. Congregants show great clarity of understanding when they speak of the differences between authentic Christian prayer and the traditional Vietnamese practices connected with ancestor worship or idolatry. They believe that prayer is more than just duty or ritual – rather that it arises from a relationship with God. This is what they mean when they say that Christians know the God that they worship (as opposed to the relationship of traditional Vietnamese folk to *Ông Trời*). Thus prayer among believers at VCF also meets our initial conditions for “appropriate contextualization” (lack of syncretism, lack of unnecessary offense).

Praise

The Vietnamese Christian Fellowship’s practice of praise mirrors that of Fellowship Church in some ways. For instance, neither congregation sings from hymnals. In both congregations, song lyrics are displayed on projector screens. Also, Fellowship Church draws from both traditional and contemporary worship styles in its services. Though VCF primarily uses songs from the *Thánh Ca*, the pastor’s goal is to transition to a mix of worship music that is mostly contemporary. In that manner, both churches are attempting to present a worship experience which makes use of a wide range of music from the past to the present. In addition, Fellowship Church sings mostly in English but occasionally in Spanish (in consideration of the Hispanic presence among them). VCF sings primarily in Vietnamese but also in English (in consideration of not only non-Vietnamese but also younger Vietnamese congregants).

Conversely, worship practices also diverge at many points. An obvious example is Fellowship Church's use of live musicians versus the use of recorded background music in VCF's services. However, this difference mostly reflects the relative availability of musicians in each congregation. Another point of divergence regards the use of special music in each church's services. The worship planners at Fellowship Church avoid the use of solos other such "presentational" music. The Vietnamese congregation is more open to the idea but often lacks the resources (mostly in terms of musicians) to present such music on a consistent basis. Also, the use of "Alleluia, Alleluia" (sung to the tune of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic") at the close of VCF services is a difference which is probably a residual effect of CMA/EVCN influence.²⁰³

The church autonomy principle frees VCF from the strictures of rigid requirements in its planning of worship. Since these praise practices do not contradict principles delineated in the *Doctrinal Statement of Fellowship Evangelical Free Church* and are inoffensive (unless doctrinal purity mandates the offense) to Vietnamese believers, they reflect appropriate contextualization.

The use of *cải lương*-style music is a more troublesome issue because some Vietnamese are offended by it because of its association with secular music. Of course, other congregants enjoy the *cải lương* style and take no issue with its use in a worship service. The conservative approach would be to exclude it because of these concerns. Yet the principle of church autonomy argues that these questions of style and instrumentation ought to be decided at the local

²⁰³ Rev. Esther Dang indicated that it was common for CMA/EVCN churches to close each of their services with a certain hymn; however, it was usually "Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow" (*Tôn Vinh Chân Thần*) rather than "Alleluia, Alleluia."

church level – as long as the theological content of those songs is compatible with the EFCA perspective. This case mirrors the discussion in Chapter 4 concerning the inclusion of *cải lương*-style music in worship. The practice is unnecessarily offensive and thus represents inappropriate contextualization according to our definition. However, the use of *cải lương*-style music in a worship service may offer an occasion to teach the congregation concerning the freedom we have in Christ – an important Christian principle. Thus the use of *cải lương* in any particular church is a question best left to the local congregation.²⁰⁴

For both VCF and Fellowship Church, the themes of the music often follow those of the sermons. However, the functional emphasis of praise and worship differs a little. The worship pastor at Fellowship Church describes the impact of praise music in terms of expressing and affirming theological points such as atonement, sin, grace and redemption. The pastor at VCF speaks of praise and worship as a vehicle for preparing the heart and he views the practice as transformative of heart and mind. Again, this only reflects a difference of emphasis – and the differing perspectives are complementary rather than contradictory. Therefore, these differences do not mean that the practices are inappropriate on semiotic grounds (that is, because of the meaning associated with them).

²⁰⁴ If the antiphonal chanting style known as *đọc kinh* were to be used in Protestant churches, a similar argument might apply because of its association with the Roman Catholic Church – and because a similar practice, *tụng kinh*, is used by Vietnamese Buddhists. But this would be more of an issue some churches than others. However, the discussion of such an issue is beyond the scope of this study since none of the Protestant churches in the GOVR use *đọc kinh* in their worship.

Confession of Sin

The opportunities for confession of sins during Fellowship Church's services occur primarily on two occasions. First, every service includes an invitation at the close of the service which provides such an opportunity. But the opportunity also arises during the celebration of communion on the first Sunday of each month. At VCF, the pastor noted these same times in the service as opportunities for the confession of sin – but also noted that invitations are given “when the Holy Spirit leads.” This emphasis on being led by the Holy Spirit is consistent with Fellowship Church's approach to worship as evidenced by their relatively flexible order of service. During the portion of Fellowship Church's service allotted to singing praise and worship, there may be frequent pauses between the songs – moments when the individual may worship God perhaps more intimately. These can be times when confession of sins may take place. This concept of being led by the Spirit is also concordant with the assertion that the Holy Spirit is the “Counselor,” “Teacher,” and “Empowerer” of the church as in stated in the *Doctrinal Statement of Fellowship Evangelical Free Church*. The openness to spontaneous operations of spiritual gifts is an additional expression of this approach.

The practice of confession of sins at VCF differs little from the practice at Fellowship Church. However, the fact that it is a *public* confession of sin makes it a more difficult obstacle to worship in the Vietnamese context. Yet the church's doctrinal statement asserts that “man is now a sinner by nature and by choice.” A failure to openly acknowledge this aspect of one's humanity

constitutes a departure from the common doctrine of the church. Therefore, even if the practice is judged to be offensive, it is *necessarily* offensive in order for the practice to be consistent with the church's concept of the "basic structure and identity" of Christianity. Thus the practice of confession of sins at VCF also meets our initial conditions for "appropriate contextualization."

Confession of Faith

Fellowship Church articulates spoken, corporate confessions of faith only on special occasions - about two to four times per year. In the Vietnamese congregation hosted by their church, the practice occurs in almost every service. Indeed, the primary difference in their practices is reflected in the frequency of the practice in each congregation (and, of course, the use of different languages) rather than the actual content of the confessions. The Vietnamese congregation normally confesses corporately the *Tín-Dieu Các Sứ-Dò* (Apostle's Creed), a confession wholly consistent with the Fellowship Church's doctrinal statement. Thus syncretistic content is not an issue in this case. Nor is there an indication that these practices are unnecessarily offensive. VCF congregants may also spontaneously confess their faith individually (usually near the beginning of the service). These confessions of faith are essentially "testimonies" and are often the primary feature of "fifth Sunday" services at VCF. The foci of these confessions tend to be the congregants' personal experiences of walking with God. Most deal with God's power to provide for us, to deliver us from trouble, etc. – none of which contradict the tenets of the EFCA. Thus the practice of these spoken

confessions faith among believers at VCF also meets our initial conditions for appropriate contextualization.

The practice of baptism at VCF also mostly reflects both the method and meaning of other EFCA churches. Baptism is performed only by immersion, only on believers (that is, no infant baptism), and signifies the believer's identification with the death and resurrection of Christ. Moreover, it symbolizes the believer's faith in the atonement of Christ and desire to follow Christ. In all these ways, it is consistent with the practice of Fellowship Church and the *Doctrinal Statement of Fellowship Evangelical Free Church*.

With respect to the meaning of baptism, I understood the pastor to say that he thought of baptism as a sacrament rather than an ordinance.²⁰⁵ But when he and other congregants spoke of baptism, they uniformly described it as a symbol of Christ's death and resurrection and not an opportunity for the imposition of grace. They referred to the act as symbolizing what God had already done (for instance, in rescuing them from sin or cleansing them) rather than what God did during the act itself. Thus the meaning is consistent with the doctrinal statement of Fellowship Church which refers to baptism as an ordinance and they describe it similarly. Even the association of baptism with the story of the ambassador being saved from drowning by *Ông Trời* did not deleteriously affect their concept of the meaning of baptism among the congregants. For instance, it might have been possible to construe the water of baptism as *not* signifying the death and

²⁰⁵ It's possible that I misunderstood the pastor - or that he misunderstood my question. The word "sacrament" is usually translated into Vietnamese as *thánh lễ*. But the literal meaning of those words in English is simply "holy ceremony." In some sense, baptism might be a holy ceremony and yet not meet theological criteria to be a sacrament.

resurrection of Jesus since the ambassador did not die and then come back to life. Yet the congregants always connect the act with the death of Jesus and his resurrection. Thus with respect to both the method and meaning of baptism, the practice among believers at VCF is free of both syncretism and unnecessarily offensive content.

Reading of Scripture

In Fellowship Church, the *Kinh Thánh* may be read responsively – though this is not common. When this occurs, the *Kinh Thánh* reading may function as a call to worship or be used to complement the song service. (Responsive readings may contain creeds or other extrabiblical readings). Whenever they might occur in the service, they are expressions of important Christian truths. The congregation's participation affirms their acceptance of those truths and their willingness to live by them. In addition, the *Kinh Thánh* is often read prior to the sermon or even at some point during the sermon.

The VCF congregation reads responsive readings but often reads the *Kinh Thánh* in unison, too. The pastor commonly reads the sermon's pericope prior to the sermon as well. The function of *Kinh Thánh* reading at VCF has three main aspects: to unify the focus of the congregation on the subject of the reading (especially prior to the sermon), to remind congregants of the importance of *Kinh Thánh* reading and to strengthen believers against the influence of sin. Though these views differ, they are not contradictory. Also, they are each consistent with the high view of the Scriptures affirmed in the *Doctrinal Statement of Fellowship Evangelical Free Church*. The more frequent use of responsive readings of the

Scriptures among VCF congregants may be a reflection of the Vietnamese respect for tradition (since such readings were common in the CMA/ECVN churches of Vietnam). At any rate, VCF's frequent use of responsive (and unison) readings strongly suggests the concept of the *Kinh Thánh*'s importance found in the doctrinal statement. It reflects that view of the Scriptures at least as well as the less frequent use of responsive readings noted in Fellowship Church's services. Therefore, since the content of the readings at VCF is always from the Scriptures and the practices were not found to be culturally offensive in themselves, the *Kinh Thánh* reading practices at VCF meet the initial criteria for appropriate contextualization.

Preaching

The proclamation at Fellowship Church primarily reflects two types of sermon series: (1) topical series and (2) "book" series. The topical series intimate an approach which emphasizes the application of the Scriptures to quotidian Christian life. The "book" series suggest a concern for deepening the understanding of the Christian faith.

At VCF, the sermons do not necessarily follow such patterns. However, the sermons do address issues of application (for instance, cooperating with the Holy Spirit). Conversely, they are also designed to correct misunderstandings that congregants may have concerning Christian faith and practice. For instance, considerable effort has been exerted to clarify the issue of proper respect to parents/ancestors.

The reference to contemporary translations (ESV and NIV) during the preaching at Fellowship Church implies a desire for clarity of proclamation in the contemporary context. The use of both the Cadman translation and newer Vietnamese translations at VCF suggests both a respect for traditional articulations of the Scriptures and an acceptance of new articulations.²⁰⁶ Thus these approaches view their common concern to contextualize proclamation through different lenses. Yet the Vietnamese approach is certainly compatible with Fellowship Church's doctrinal statement as long as the method of exegesis follows a literal, historical-grammatical approach which applies "the rules of grammar, literature, history and culture"²⁰⁷ to scripture to unlock and understand the author's meaning." The pastor's education should have prepared him to exegete in this manner and from all appearances he does so. Consider, for instance, the references to the Greek New Testament which characterize his preaching.

Vietnamese culture is referred to for purposes of illustration but it is not used as a theological locus. Neither is Vietnamese culture used as a counterpoint to "refine" the revealed truth of scripture. Conversely, it is more common for the pastor to use the Scriptures as a counterpoint to refine the typical Vietnamese cultural understanding. For instance, he regularly uses the Scriptures to modify the Vietnamese view of *Ông Trời* as not merely concerned with justice – but also mercy. He may also use Vietnamese proverbs to either contradict or refine the

²⁰⁶ The strong reliance on the Cadman version of the *Kinh Thánh* may also reflect the relative scarcity of contemporary Vietnamese translations.

²⁰⁷ The use of "culture," in this case, does not refer to the use of Vietnamese culture but the culture of the Scriptures (for instance, first century ancient near eastern culture) considered in exegesis.

Vietnamese conception of relationship to parents and ancestors. For instance, in using the proverb that says “if you eat the fruit, remember the origin,” he re-directs the honor it teaches toward parents by asking, “Who was the source of blessings to your parents?” Since the obvious answer is that our parents’ blessings were given by God, we ought to honor God *above* them. In similar ways, other proverbs are also used to refine the Vietnamese perspective on parents/ancestors.

The result is that the preaching at VCF is compatible with Fellowship Church’s doctrinal statement. The inclusion of elements of Vietnamese culture indicates a strong consideration for appealing to the sensibilities of the Vietnamese congregants. Yet the manner in which those cultural elements are included demonstrates the high view of the Scriptures and the literal, historical-grammatical approach affirmed in the *Doctrinal Statement of Fellowship Evangelical Free Church*. Thus proclamation at VCF also demonstrates contextualization which is free of syncretism and unnecessary offense.

The Lord’s Supper

At both VCF and Fellowship Church, the ordinance is practiced on the first Sunday of each month. In fact, the procedure is similar in most respects - with some modification to accommodate the larger congregation at Fellowship Church. In both congregations, there is no official liturgy and the congregation receives the elements by intinction.

As with baptism, VCF’s pastor indicated to me that he views *Tiệc Thánh* as a sacrament. Yet his description of baptism’s meaning (and those of the laity at

VCF) did not suggest the imposition of grace in the act.²⁰⁸ Instead, the descriptions were entirely consistent with the memorialist view found in the *Doctrinal Statement of Fellowship Evangelical Free Church*. Fellowship Church's worship pastor, too, agrees that the elements symbolize the body and blood of Jesus Christ sacrificed for humanity. On the whole, the views of congregants and clergy at VCF reflect a view of the ordinance which is consistent with both the practice of Fellowship Church and their doctrinal statement.

However, Vietnamese culture does affect the perspectives of some congregants regarding the meaning of *Tiệc Thánh*. The traditional Vietnamese practice of remembering ancestors and their contributions to the family's well-being is connected to some Vietnamese Christians' understanding of remembering the sacrifice of Christ in the observance of the Lord's Supper. Indeed, Jesus seen as a spiritual progenitor or "ancestor" of those who are in family of God. The connection is strengthened by the "blood-drinking" ritual used to adopt a new "brother" into the family. Through the ritual, a new member is added to the family and obligations are accepted by all those who offered blood to trust and protect one another as family members. In the Vietnamese context, this may even indicate obligations to the new family's ancestors. Conceivably, some might reason that as a new Christian one is bound to ritual observances toward the ancestors of others in the church family! However, this association with ancestor worship does not appear to have influenced VCF's view of the Lord's Supper. Mi-ri-am said that *Tiệc Thánh* reflects only an obligation to be

²⁰⁸ Again, the confusion may have arisen because of my translation of the word "sacrament" as *thánh lễ*. As in the earlier case concerning baptism, the Lord's Supper might be considered a holy ceremony and yet not meet the theological criteria to be a sacrament.

faithful to Christ and trust in him for our protection. Similarly, An-ne, Sa-mu-ên, and others expressed views which were also consistent with those of Fellowship Church. Moreover, no instances of syncretism concerning *Tiệc Thánh* were found. Thus though some potential exists for syncretism, none was actually detected - probably due to the considerable attention that the pastor gives to clarifying the Christian view toward ancestor worship. Once again, the practices at VCF are found to meet the initial conditions for appropriate contextualization.

Offertory Collections

At Fellowship Church, a specific time is set aside for both the offertory collection and the offertory prayer; both actions occur prior to the sermon. At VCF, the offertory prayer occurs prior to the sermon but there is no specific time for the collection. The congregants place their offerings in a collection box near the front door of the worship space – rather than into offering bags circulated among them as in the services at Fellowship Church. The different approach used at VCF is intentional. The pastor believes that having no particular time for the offering allows congregants to give more freely. At any rate, neither Fellowship Church nor the EFCA have any specific rules concerning the method by which the offering is collected and the use of the collection box is consistent with a concern for increased privacy - a feature of Vietnamese culture.

The worship pastor at Fellowship Church describes the offering as (1) an act of worship and (2) an opportunity to recognize God as the Source of all

blessings. Similar sentiments were expressed by worshippers at VCF.²⁰⁹ Yet two additional concepts surfaced among VCF worshippers: (1) the use of the offering to help the poor, and (2) the idea of participating in the offering as testimony to God of personal devotion. Fellowship Church evidences a concern for using the collection to help the needy in that they are involved with ministries which include: a food pantry, an outreach to help at-risk youth through tutoring, and volunteer work with Habitat for Humanity to build homes for the needy both in Knoxville and in Mexico. Mi-ri-am's assertion that giving "reveals your heart to God" was not evidenced in the practice of Fellowship Church - nor in the church's doctrinal statement. However, it is consistent with the point that Jesus was making concerning the "widow's mites" (Luke 21: 1-4). Jesus compares the widow's meager gift to the larger contributions of others and esteems her gift to be a greater act of devotion since she "cast in all her living." The idea is not mentioned in Fellowship Church's practice nor in their doctrinal statement, yet it is in harmony with the Scriptures and therefore cannot be destructive of the "basic structure and integrity" of the Christian faith.

In summary, the actual behaviors and some of the meanings connected to the offering are different. Yet those differences are simply designed to accommodate Vietnamese sensibilities and do not suggest syncretism. Thus the behaviors connected to the offertory collection (and their underlying meaning)

²⁰⁹ Consider, for instance, An-ne's comments that the offering honors God. Also, the emphasis on thanksgiving that Ma-thê and Sa-mu-ên articulated is at least partly based on an understanding that everything comes from God. Thus, the two congregations are similar in their conceptions of the meaning of the offering.

reflect a practice among believers at VCF which lacks syncretism and avoids unnecessary offense to the congregants.

Occasional Services

Fellowship Church holds special services each year on Good Friday, Easter and Christmas. As in most churches, the themes of music, sermons, and other worship elements at each time year focus on the death, resurrection, and incarnation of Christ, respectively. In addition, Fellowship Church holds special “evenings of worship and prayer” which allow an opportunity for congregants to participate in extended times of corporate praise and worship as well as more intimate times of prayer.

VCF also celebrates special services at Easter and Christmas. Predictably, the Easter service emphasizes the death and resurrection of Christ and Christmas addresses the story of Christ’s incarnation. VCF uses the Christmas service as an occasion for inviting members of the Vietnamese community. There is a concerted effort to tell the real story of Christ’s birth (as opposed to diluting the story with elements that detract from the “true” meaning of Christmas).²¹⁰ Aside from these attributes, VCF’s services are essentially the same as those of Fellowship Church in terms of worship practices and their associated meanings.²¹¹ However, VCF also celebrates some other times of year: (1) the lunar and solar New Years, (2) Vietnamese Memorial Day, and (3) Thanksgiving.

²¹⁰ Interestingly, a small Christmas tree (originally a pagan symbol rather than a Christian symbol) is normally placed in the sanctuary during that time of year.

²¹¹ That is, they are the same as Fellowship Church’s services except for the differences already discussed (differences in language use, praise, readings, preaching, *et al*).

Both lunar and solar New Years services are celebrated with an emphasis on thanksgiving for the past and hopes for the future. The primary difference in the celebration of *Tết* is the more likely inclusion of music by Vietnamese composers and the increased participation by Vietnamese members of the community. It is important to remember Mi-ri-am's comment that failing to observe *Tết* would be offensive to the Vietnamese community. Instead of the offense of omitting the celebration, VCF uses the occasion as opportunity to reach out to the community. However, traditional drama and song which are incompatible with Christian faith are consciously omitted – though traditional songs such as *Xuân Vẻ* and *Cả Khúc Tạ Ôn* may be sung.²¹²

The Vietnamese Memorial Day is celebrated on or near April 30 of each year. This celebration is a time to give thanks for God's deliverance and provision. Congregants also offer prayers for family members or friends who may have been lost or left behind. But the worship practices themselves are free of syncretism though they incorporate considerable content from Vietnamese culture (mostly stories of life in Vietnam or the emigration/immigration/refugee experience). VCF uses the service as an opportunity to invite the community to remember their common experiences in an accommodating milieu while sharing the gospel and giving testimony to God's goodness.

Thanksgiving services are also characterized by testimonies of God's goodness. Congregants proclaim God's faithfulness in the midst of adversity and

²¹² *Xuân Vẻ* is a song primarily about the beauty of spring. But theme of *Cả Khúc Tạ Ôn* is thanksgiving for God's help through adversity and danger. Though *Cả Khúc Tạ Ôn* does not specifically mention Jesus, it is fairly explicit in its Christian content since the singers also express their gratitude for the sacrifice God provided on the cross to purchase their freedom.

God's graciousness in rescuing them from perils.²¹³ Thankfulness is a mark of Vietnamese culture - so it is not surprising that thanksgiving is a strong component in all of the church's occasional services. Thus the occasional services at VCF are also appropriately contextualized with respect to the questions of syncretism and offense to the congregants.

²¹³ Though the dead may be remembered in such services, nothing akin to ancestor worship occurs in them.

CHAPTER 6

VIETNAMESE WORSHIP AND MODELS OF CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY

Stephen B. Bevans provides six possible models which may form the substrate from which a group's contextual theology may arise. Each model outlines the approach that is taken by the group in combining those elements that make the theology contextual. He speaks of those elements in terms of "past" and "present" experiences. Experiences of the past include: (1) those set down in Scripture and (2) those which have been kept safe and defended over a period of time as tradition. A theology becomes contextual when it begins to consider not only elements of the past but also present experiences or *contextual* elements. These elements include: (1) culture, (2) personal or communal experiences - for instance, war or immigration, (3) social location – that is, factors such as gender or economic/educational status and (4) the way that a society changes.

The six models represent different approaches to the problem of how to combine these elements in order to create a given contextual theology. I have outlined each of Bevans' models in the following summary (Bevans, 141-143):

The Translation Model – Revelation is characterized by this model as propositional and content-oriented. The model pays great attention to experiences of the past. It views Scripture and tradition as complete and holds them paramount in influence. It views context as good/trustworthy but not equal in authority to Scripture or tradition. Its method is to *fit the gospel into the context* with as little change as possible.

The Anthropological Model – This model takes the role of culture much more seriously. It views revelation as already present in the context. It treats Scripture and tradition as culturally conditioned and incomplete. It sees context as equal in authority to both Scripture and tradition. Its method is to discern where the gospel is already in the context and to illuminate it.

The Praxis Model – Revelation is characterized by this model as the work to which God calls humanity. Like the anthropological model, this model treats Scripture and tradition as culturally conditioned and incomplete - but is more suspicious of context (which may at times distort the truth). However, context *may* at other times be equal to Scripture and tradition. Its method involves continual alternating sequences of reflection and practice in order to formulate theology.

The Synthetic Model – This approach combines elements of the last three models and the countercultural model. This model treats revelation as having attributes of translational, anthropological, and praxis models. It views Scripture and tradition as authoritative but culturally conditioned and incomplete. It sees the best understanding of these as constantly evolving. Similarly, it views experiences of the past as incomplete and ambiguous. Its method is to start by listening to culture in order to identify its important themes and then combine those with Scripture and tradition in a “both/and” manner which satisfies voices on both sides.

The Countercultural Model – Revelation is connected to the *fact* or *narrative/story* of Christ. This model views Scripture and tradition as complete - but human understanding of it as incomplete. Nevertheless, they are superior to context, which is viewed as “radically ambiguous and resistant to tradition” and the model’s method relies on the *story* “as a lens to interpret, critique and challenge context” (Bevans, 143).

The Transcendental Model – Revelation is thought of as a “personal presence, as encountered in subjective (personal, communal) experience” (Bevans, 143). It regards Scripture and tradition as authoritative but culturally conditioned and incomplete. Context is thought to be reliable and good. Individual experiences are seen as “a clue to wider experiences” and are “conditioned by the radical, communal nature of humanity” (Bevans, 143). Its method depends on the sympathy (or antipathy) experienced by the individual when living through various situations, states, or transitions of life.

None of these models are considered to be “better” than the others – although a particular model may be better in some ways than others. For purposes of this study, the issue is not that all of the worship practices for a given church (or group of churches) must conform to any particular model. Rather it is that they be relatively uniform in their approach. This unity is significant because it suggests that the church is consistent in the way it deals with elements of the past and present in the process of contextualizing various worship practices. Because of such a consistency, people have a sense of how to relate past experiences to

present experiences in order to grapple with theological questions that arise in their lives.

However, the act of discerning which influences are “past” and which are “present” can be more difficult than one might expect, particularly with respect to CMA practices. Since most of these practices seem not only “overtly Christian” but largely “western,” they would usually be seen as “elements of the past.” In most cases, this would be accurate. But the whole truth is somewhat more complex. For instance, some Christian worship practices of the CMA/ECVN churches may be considered “present” or contextual elements (for instance, the *Tết* tree). Yet other CMA/ECVN practices - which may be western in origin - may be construed as “elements of the past” since the church of interest to us may or may not follow those traditions. That is, such practices may conflict with a *different* western practice in the church of interest - because that church is now affiliated with a different Christian tradition. For example, the CMA practices concerning baptism (immersion only) differ from United Methodist practices (immersion, pouring, and sprinkling). Yet both practices are also connected to past traditions. Thus some traditions may conflict not only with “present” context - but also with other traditions. Nevertheless, when the attributes of a practice (and its related meanings) are primarily connected to *any* western tradition, we will view them as tradition.²¹⁴

Further complication arises because of the difference in the context of first-generation Vietnamese immigrants as compared to that of later generations.

²¹⁴ This meaning of tradition should be understood as different than what is meant by “Vietnamese tradition” (that is, *culturally*-inherited Vietnamese forms and meanings).

This underscores the importance of remembering that time is a continuum – thus the “past” and “present” are relative terms. What is “present” experience for older Vietnamese immigrants may be largely “past” experience for their offspring. Thus the different generations may view the same acts of contextualization as representing different models of contextual theology!

Certain practices found in these churches arose as a result of contextualization which occurred many years ago in the CMA/EVCN churches of Vietnam (or even before that); other practices arose in the refugee camps or after entry into the United States. Examples of practices which arose in Vietnam include: (1) the use of the *Kinh Thánh* translation and its early revisions, (2) the use of the *Thánh Ca*, (3) most practices related to the celebration of *Tết* – for instance, the *Tết* tree and the distribution of “lucky money,” (4) worship services of extended length – often several hours, (5) extended sermons – sometimes an hour or more, (6) identification of *Ông Trời* with the Christian God (7) the closing of prayers with “*nhân danh Đức Chúa Jêsus-Christ, A-men*” and (8) the closing of services with a particular song.

Practices which (at least primarily) developed in the churches after the Vietnamese diaspora²¹⁵ include: (1) the use of the more recent denominational revisions of the *Kinh Thánh* translation, (2) the use of various denominational revisions of the *Thánh Ca*, (3) the use of contemporary western music styles – including western worship songs/choruses, (4) the use of Vietnamese-English

²¹⁵ Obviously, these churches were not all established at the same time; neither did all of the individual members depart Vietnam at the same time. Thus, some of these “post-departure” practices may have been found in Vietnamese churches prior to the departure of some congregants.

code-switching in proclamation and other elements of the service, (5) the practice of *Ôn Kinh Thánh* or “Bible Review,” (6) the use of audio headphones for English translation of the service, (7) the unique celebration of Thanksgiving Day - especially as linked to the experiences of “boat people” and other refugees, (8) the use of *Kinh Thánh* verses in lieu of “lucky money” during the celebration of *Tết* and (9) the celebration of the *solar* New Year.

For certain other practices, it is unclear exactly when and where they may have developed; indeed, they may have developed simultaneously in different parts of the world. These practices include (1) the use of *cải lương* and other contemporary Vietnamese music styles in worship services, (2) the celebration of Mothers’ Day and Fathers’ Day, and (3) the annual celebration of Vietnamese Memorial Day. For the purpose of this study we will discuss the models from the perspective of an adult first-generation immigrant – with the understanding that practices developed in Vietnam and refugee experiences may not be part of the (personal or communal) “present” experience of later cohorts.

Worship in the United Methodist Churches

In the Vietnamese United Methodist churches of Ohio, tradition and Scripture are the dominant factors far more important than cultural ideas. The fact that the church’s hymnody is primarily a translated version of a western hymnal indicates a view of tradition as authoritative. (However, some openness to nontraditional practices is apparent in the use of contemporary Christian music.) The relatively low level of contextualization found in the 1926 version of the *Kinh Thánh* strongly suggests a view of Scripture and tradition as both complete

and authoritative – and perhaps, a view of revelation as propositional and content-oriented. The celebration of the sacraments falls within the scope of United Methodist practice and the meaning behind those acts is consistent with the United Methodist view concerning them. The frequent use of responsive readings, creeds and formal prayers (such as the Lord’s Prayer) also emphasizes the authority of Scripture and tradition.

This is not to say that culture, social location, etc. are ignored. A relatively high degree of cultural influence is seen in the way that the congregation celebrates certain occasional services – and most particularly, in the celebration of *Tết*. Yet even in celebrating the most important of Vietnamese holidays, the sermon themes remain free of syncretizing content. There are no references to lesser spirits traveling to give their annual reports to the Jade Emperor; there is no discussion of prayers to ancestors. Yet even on occasions such as *Tết*, translations of traditional western songs such *Gánh Lúa Về* (or “Bringing in the Rice”) are common – and the worship services are characterized by an evangelistic focus.

Pastor Dang’s preaching suggests that she is attempting to insert the gospel into the culture through the Areopagean method (that is, she declares to them the *Ông Trời* that they “ignorantly worship”²¹⁶). Her sermons make use of cultural elements such Vietnamese proverbs and stories - but primarily as illustrations of concepts from Scripture and tradition. Even the relatively longer sermons and longer worship services suggest the importance of tradition since long sermons and services were common in the CMA/ECVN churches of

²¹⁶ Cf. Acts 17: 23

Vietnam. Finally, the amount of time spent in the Bible reviews also emphasizes the importance of Scripture.

Therefore, the practices associated with proclamation, prayer, praise, the sacraments, the traditional conduct of the offertory, and other behaviors already cited suggest a propositional view of revelation and a high view of Scripture and tradition. The use of cultural elements such as stories and proverbs suggests that context is viewed as reliable and good and the method (at least with respect to proclamation) indicates an attempt to insert the gospel into the Vietnamese context.

This view is not as strongly implied by the manner in which *Tết* is celebrated – though care is taken to not allow elements of culture to trump Scripture. Neither is it demonstrated in the change in focus during the celebration of Thanksgiving (from the experiences of the Pilgrims to the experiences of the “boat people”) which is primarily driven by “present communal experiences.” Yet the Vietnamese United Methodist churches of Ohio primarily exhibit worship practices which strongly suggest the translation model of contextual theology.

Worship in the Baptist Churches

The principle of autonomy in Baptist church government allows for a great deal of diversity to develop with respect to worship practices. Indeed, the *Baptist Faith and Message* (which is, in itself, optional for Baptists) speaks much more of ideas or doctrine than it does of actual practices. There is no “book of worship” such as we find in the United Methodist churches to even provide examples of how worship should be properly done. However, because of the

doctrine of *sola Scriptura*, Scripture tends to overshadow tradition as a source for theological inquiry and, in doing so, it becomes the most important arbiter in questions of practice. Thus, the confluence of these two principles (church autonomy and *sola Scriptura*) suggests a relaxed approach to *traditio* – but also, a more narrowly focused sense of *tradita*.²¹⁷ In fact, Scripture itself becomes the primary component of *tradita*.

Just as with the United Methodist churches, a sense of the authority of Scripture and tradition surfaces in the Baptist congregations. Again, the use of translated western hymnody and the frequent use of responsive readings underline the importance of Scripture.²¹⁸ The preaching at each of the Baptist churches may draw from Vietnamese proverbs and stories – but only when they illustrate biblical truths. Finally, the practice of ending prayers by praying in unison “*nhân danh Đức Chúa Jêsus-Christ, A-men*” is also traditional - a residual feature of CMA/ECVN worship. All these attributes argue that these practices reflect a translational approach to contextualization.

However, there are some worship behaviors that might lead us in other directions. For instance, the practice of publicly confessing sins strongly opposes Vietnamese cultural tendencies. But does the practice arise from a countercultural approach? Most likely, it does not. Rather the public confession of sins simply mirrors the traditional practice of both CMA/ECVN churches and other Baptist churches.

²¹⁷ *Traditio* is the process associated with transmission of various aspects of tradition. *Tradita* refers to those aspects of tradition which are transmitted (Schreier 109-113)

²¹⁸ In the Memphis church, the use of the Lord's Prayer also reinforces the idea that Scripture is highly viewed.

What about the notable emphasis on prayer found in the Vietnamese Baptist churches? Is this increased concern with prayer the result of a transcendental approach? This may be more likely – particularly in the Memphis church. The emphasis on prayer is markedly higher in the Memphis congregation than in other Baptist churches - and the stronger prayer emphasis harmonizes well with the contemplative character of Asian culture.

By far, the most significant effects of Vietnamese traditional culture are manifest in the occasional services. The presence of the *Tết* tree and the especially the “lucky money” nearly argue for an anthropological approach. Yet the shared understanding that there is actually no luck attached to the money tends to contraindicate that approach - and the use of Scripture verses instead of the “lucky money” brings us back to the emphasis on Scripture so intimately associated with the translational approach. In summary, the Vietnamese Baptist Churches exhibit worship practices which strongly suggest the translation model of contextual theology – but in the case of the Memphis church, there may be a tendency to incorporate the transcendental approach in their views concerning prayer.

Worship at the Vietnamese Christian Fellowship

At the Vietnamese Christian Fellowship of Knoxville, Tennessee, the worship practices also suggest the translational model. The approach to prayer involves use of the Lord’s Prayer and ending the prayers with “*nhân danh Đức Chúa Jêsus-Christ, A-men*” as in the CMA/ECVN churches. (The emphasis on petition and thanksgiving in prayer suggests the influence of anthropological factors such as Vietnamese culture and the immigrant experience – but also the

influence of CMA/ECVN tradition.) The use of translated creeds and the dependence of translated western hymns also suggest the translational model. The influence of tradition is further evidenced by the practice of closing the services with a particular song and the importance of the Scriptures is implied by the congregation's frequent use of responsive readings.

The pastor's preaching might appear countercultural at times – for instance, when he redefines *Ông Trời* as not only just but also merciful. But as demonstrated in the discussion of the United Methodist pastor's teaching above, this is actually an attribute of the translational model. Similarly, the public confession of sins, as previously noted, is not reflective of the countercultural model. Instead, it simply suggests the translational model since it is based on the traditional practice of CMA/ECVN churches.

The pastor's plan to increase the use of contemporary worship music in the services indicates a desire to consider the changing social location of congregants. This is an attribute of the anthropological model and perhaps the praxis model. However, the practice can not be said to truly reflect an anthropological (or praxis) approach unless the change is predicated on the idea that context can be equal to Scripture and tradition. For instance, this could be demonstrated if the lyrics expressed ideas different than the traditional/scriptural tenets of Vietnamese Christianity.

The manner in which VCF celebrates *Tết* involves considerable influence from Vietnamese culture - but that influence is limited by Scripture and (Christian) tradition. The approach in this case seems almost synthetic. It begins

with culture in order to discover the basic themes (such as newness, and particularly new life) and identifies its important symbols (for example, the *Tết* tree). But it eliminates those symbols/meanings which are thought to conflict with Scripture (ancestor worship, traditional drama or song which may contain animistic themes or content, etc.) and introduces the gospel into the culture with its hymnody and preaching. The approach is far from countercultural but it is transformative to the extent that Christian content is inserted in the songs (for instance, the sacrifice of the cross in *Cả Khúc TạƠn*) and in proclamation (as it would be in any of their services). The celebration of Vietnamese Memorial Day involves a similar approach. Though its origin is in “present experience,” the manner in which it is celebrated is predicated on Scripture and tradition.

But the manner in which VCF celebrates Easter and Christmas suggests the even firmer reliance on western Christian tradition which is found in their regular (non-occasional) services. The difference in approaches may be due to the fact that long-standing Christian traditions exist which have shaped the celebration of Easter and Christmas over many centuries. However, Christian traditions concerning the proper celebration of *Tết* and Vietnamese Memorial Day are scarcer or at least less historically ensconced. Thus Christian tradition has much less influence on the planning of those services.

In the final analysis, a reliance on Scripture and tradition still dominates the order of service and most of the worship practices. Though the central themes dealt with in the celebration of *Tết* and Vietnamese Memorial Day are drawn from context, the practices used and the associated content and meanings

communicated in addressing those themes - are consistently based on Scripture and Christian tradition. Thus the practices involved with VCF's (regular and occasional) services primarily reflect the translational model.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study addressed the appropriateness of contextualization in the worship practices of six churches in the GOVR. Each church was affiliated with or sponsored by a denominational church (United Methodist, Baptist or Evangelical Free Church). In each case, we compared the contextualized practices of each church to those of an exemplar church of the same denomination and to the respective church or denomination's literature as concerned with worship issues. But before addressing the the study's conclusions concerning the contextualizations of various worship practices with respect to each type of church, it must be noted that the appropriateness of some contextualizations can be *unrelated* to the particular denomination in which they are found. For instance, the most striking difference between the worship of any of the Vietnamese Protestant churches and their non-Vietnamese counterparts is, of course, the use of the Vietnamese language in worship. However, decisions concerning language usage are not so simple and obvious as they might appear.

For example, Eugene Nida's insights on the structure of communication suggest that we consider the receptor's familiarity with each dialect. In other words, who is the receptor – and what dialect will he or she understand most easily and clearly? The churches in this study have a significant number of congregants that were born in each of the various regions of Vietnam. Thus, they may speak any of the four existing dialects of the language. Moreover, while

most Vietnamese can often understand the other dialects fairly well, an opportunity still exists for confusion to arise – particularly when the Hue dialect is involved.²¹⁹

Many Vietnamese (even those from the south) will speak of the northern dialect as more “standard” or more formally correct. This suggests that the use of the northern dialect in church services should be preferred. However, the majority of the congregants in the Vietnamese churches of the GOVR originated in the southern regions of Vietnam. They are naturally more familiar with the southern dialect. For this reason, the southern dialect is primarily used in the Vietnamese churches of the region. (Some of the Vietnamese who came from South Vietnam may actually speak the northern dialect - having come to the south in the 1954 “southward march.” However, the majority of these folks would also be familiar with the southern dialect.)

Over the years, a second issue has arisen which impacts the choice of language usage. As the adult Vietnamese immigrants age, the churches have accumulated significant populations of younger second-generation Vietnamese.²²⁰ This group is often more comfortable with English. Chapter 4 noted that the Vietnamese Baptist Church of Memphis solved this problem by providing a separate English service for the younger folks and also by providing English translation (using earphones) for those who desired to remain in the main

²¹⁹ The Hue dialect is considerably different from the others. Most of the differences are concerned with the tonal contours of the words or other issues of pronunciation. However, in some cases, the Hue dialect may use completely different words than those used in the other dialects.

²²⁰ Of course, this exact problem is not found in the non-Vietnamese American churches. Yet those churches have the parallel problem of dealing increasingly with the various non-English-speakers who arrived in the last few decades from diverse parts of the globe.

sanctuary's service. Though these solutions may not be feasible for some smaller churches, they do help to adapt the message of the gospel to the particular second-generation Vietnamese context. The use of English among members of that group lowers linguistic barriers to understanding the message while allowing it to be presented in the context of the Vietnamese immigrant culture in which they live. Of course, in order to be optimally effective, a skilled translator is required. Usually it is best if this translator is a second-generation Vietnamese person who is comfortable with both languages. In churches where such a solution is not feasible because of the lack of appropriate equipment or personnel, the practice of alternating between Vietnamese and English during the service ameliorates the situation. However, the effectiveness of that strategy will also be largely dependent on the language skills (in Vietnamese and English) of those leading the services.

In general, the use of the Vietnamese language does not present problems with respect to the clarity of communicating the gospel.²²¹ However, the older *Kinh Thánh* translations do contain archaic and obsolete Vietnamese words which occasionally require explanation to the hearers. When translation might be unclear, the pastors may use a code-switching strategy. This strategy involves the use of the appropriate English word (or phrase) which is parallel in meaning to the unclear Vietnamese word or phrase. This is followed by an explanation of the word's meaning in Vietnamese. In this way both the older and younger Vietnamese have a better chance of understanding the meaning of the word or

²²¹ The exception to this is the effect of the tonal aspect of the language on the translation of hymnody which was discussed in earlier chapters.

phrase in question. It seems unlikely that any syncretism would arise because of such a practice. Also, any offense caused by the practice is defensible by the concern for clarity in the communication.

Of course, the choice to use the Vietnamese language in worship (whether exclusively or along with the English language) is only one of the many decisions which must be made with respect to worship practices. It is also an example of how generational differences affect the “appropriateness” of a worship practice. For first-generation Vietnamese Americans, the CMA practices seem almost to be “present” and thus much more comfortable and naturally appropriate. For later generations, those same practices are more “past” and consequently less obviously appropriate. First-generation converts are typically concerned with differentiating themselves from the “present” experience of their surrounding culture – in that case, a predominantly Buddhist culture. Thus contextualization may be slight and the use of western forms may be accepted (as much as possible) “as is.” Once these practices become widespread, they are passed along to later generations in the same context. But second- and third-generation *immigrants* are less concerned with differentiating themselves from that context and more open to influence from “present” experience in the North American culture.

Thus practices which may be more appropriate for first-generation Vietnamese Americans include: (1) the use of Cadman *Kinh Thánh* translation, (2) the use of the *Thánh Ca*, (3) most practices related to the celebration of *Tết* – for instance, the *Tết* tree (4) worship services of extended length, (5) sermons of extended length, (6) identification of *Ông Trời* with the Christian God (7) the

closing of prayers with “*nhân danh Đức Chúa Jêsus-Christ, A-men,*” (8) the celebration of Vietnamese Memorial Day on April 30 of each year, (9) the closing of services with a particular song, and (10) the celebration of Thanksgiving Day as linked to the experiences of “boat people” and other refugees.

Practices which are more appropriate for later generations include: (1) the use of newer revisions of the *Kinh Thánh* translation, (2) the use of *cải lương*, (3) the use of contemporary western music styles, (4) the use of Vietnamese-English code-switching in proclamation and other elements of the service, (5) the use of audio headphones for English translation of the service, (6) the celebration of Mothers’ Day and Fathers’ Day, (7) the use of *Kinh Thánh* verses in lieu of “lucky money” during the celebration of *Tết* and (8) the celebration of the *solar* New Year.

An additional distinction may be made between *immigrants* and *refugees* with respect to the influence of their life experiences on worship practices. For instance, the sense of thankfulness expressed in worship and their celebration of God’s provision for them may be more powerful among refugees. Also, they may be more compelled to pray for family and friends in times of trouble. However, this distinction is blurred for two reasons: (1) the difference between an immigrant and a refugee is, to some extent, subjective²²² and (2) Vietnamese culture as a whole exhibits a considerable tendency toward thanksgiving – irrespective of refugee experience.

²²² Chapter 2 includes a discussion of the way that the different groups of Vietnamese emigrants were viewed by Americans when they entered the United States.

The remainder of this chapter will address the contextualization of worship practices for each specific church in the study. Some additional attention may be given to generational influences.

Contextualization in the Vietnamese United Methodist Churches of Ohio

After analyzing the worship behaviors of the Vietnamese United Methodist Churches and their meanings, practices were found to be free of syncretism and unnecessary offense. Thus those practices meet the initial conditions for appropriate contextualization. In the Vietnamese United Methodist churches of Ohio, tradition and Scripture are clearly more authoritative than culture. This is evidenced by attributes such as the church's hymnody, the Bible review, and the frequent use of responsive readings, creeds and formal prayers (such as the Lord's Prayer).

The celebration of the sacraments falls within the scope of United Methodist practice and the meaning behind those acts is consistent with United Methodism. Even the service connected with the celebration of *Tết* remains free of syncretistic content. Finally, the pastor's sermons (including the manner in which she uses cultural elements) manifest the importance of Christian tradition. The *Ôn Kinh Thánh* practice is an example of an innovation which is important for all generations - but perhaps, slightly more important for the first-generation Vietnamese Americans.

These attributes of the Vietnamese United Methodist churches of Ohio strongly suggest the translation model of contextual theology. It has also been demonstrated that the worship practices are free of syncretism and elements

which might cause unnecessary offense. Thus the worship practices of the United Methodist churches of Dayton and Columbus meet the requirements of appropriate contextualization.

Contextualization in the Vietnamese Baptist Churches of Kentucky

In the Vietnamese Baptist churches of Kentucky, some worship behaviors were identified which are departures from Baptist tradition (such as their practice of closing prayers by praying in unison “*nhân danh Đức Chúa Jêsus-Christ, Amen*”). However, none of the worship practices suggested syncretism or were unnecessarily offensive to the Vietnamese congregants. The principle of autonomy in Baptist church government and the doctrine of *sola Scriptura* tend to grant relatively less influence to church tradition as a source for theological inquiry while Scripture takes the central role. For these reasons, a wide range of worship practices are allowable – restricted only by a *voluntary* observance of the Baptist doctrinal statement (see Appendix III).

As with the United Methodist congregations, the use of translated western hymnody and the frequent use of responsive readings echo this focus on tradition and Scripture. The preaching at each of these Baptist churches may draw from Vietnamese proverbs and stories – but only when they illustrate biblical truths. All these practices are consistent with a translational approach to contextualization. Thus the worship practices as a whole manifest an appropriate contextualization.

Contextualization in the Vietnamese Baptist Church of Memphis

In the Vietnamese Baptist church of Memphis, the same worship behaviors were identified as departures from Baptist tradition as in the churches of Kentucky. However, once again, the worship practices do not reflect syncretistic thinking nor are they likely to result in unnecessary offense – with one exception. Some Vietnamese people associate the *cải lương* style with secular music; therefore, they disapprove of its use in the church. Conversely, other members enjoy the *cải lương* style and see no problem with its use in a church setting. Since the use of this style of music is unnecessary and offensive, it represents an example of inappropriate contextualization under our definition.

As with other Vietnamese Baptist churches, the principle of autonomy in Baptist church government and the doctrine of *sola Scriptura* work together to mitigate the influence of church tradition as a theological locus. Therefore, Scripture becomes the most important determinant of belief and practice though it is constrained to some degree by the tenets of the *Baptist Faith and Message*. The use of translated western hymnody and the frequent use of responsive readings reflect this emphasis on Scripture and tradition. While the preaching makes use of Vietnamese proverbs/stories, such stories do not represent superior *loci theologici*. Instead, they are merely context-based illustrations of the scriptural truth. These and other practices (such as the use of the Lord's Prayer) are consistent with a translational approach to contextualization.

However, the emphasis on prayer found in the Memphis church suggests the transcendental model. This stronger focus on prayer is not surprising given the

meditative nature of Asian peoples and their consequent attention to *sapientia*. In summary, the Vietnamese Baptist Church in Memphis exhibits worship practices which strongly suggest the translation model of contextual theology along with some inclination to incorporate the transcendental approach in their views concerning prayer. But despite this inclination in one area of worship practice (prayer), the worship practices as a whole manifest a translational approach since the emphasis on prayer does not contraindicate Holy Scripture, the primary arbiter of *tradita* among Baptists.

There is no theological *necessity* to include *cải lương* in the worship services. Thus, the offensiveness of the music indicates that it is an example of inappropriate contextualization. In sum, the use of *cải lương* music exemplifies inappropriate contextualization and the use of “lucky money” is at least problematic. However, these Baptist churches primarily worship in ways which are appropriately contextualized.

Contextualization at the Vietnamese Christian Fellowship

The worship practices at the Vietnamese Christian Fellowship of Knoxville, Tennessee also reflect appropriate contextualization. The practices are, in each case, free of syncretism and lacking in elements that are likely to offend congregants unnecessarily – with an exception, the inclusion of *cải lương*-style music in worship. The practice is unnecessarily offensive and thus represents inappropriate contextualization according to our definition (though there is admittedly some advantage to its use as well).

At VCF, the worship practices strongly suggest the translational model. The evidence is similar to that found at the other Vietnamese churches in this study. The use of translated creeds and the dependence on translated western hymns also reflect the translational model's concern for church tradition. The influence of tradition is further evidenced by the practice of closing the services with a particular song. The emphasis on both Scripture and tradition are manifest in the congregation's frequent use of responsive readings. The use of the Lord's Prayer and the practice of ending prayers with "*nhân danh Đức Chúa Jêsu-Christ, A-men*" reflect the tradition of CMA/ECVN churches. The pastor's approach to proclamation also reflects the emphases of the translational model.

However, the emphasis on petition and thanksgiving in prayer and the pastor's plan to increase the use of contemporary worship music in the services indicate a concern for "present experience" which is typical of the anthropological model - and perhaps the praxis model. However, the influence of anthropological considerations is not equal to the concern for Scripture and tradition. For this reason (and because of the lack of authentic concern for the countercultural model), the worship practices fail to faithfully represent either an anthropological or synthetic model.

The manner in which VCF celebrates *Tết* and Vietnamese Memorial Day suggests the influence of Vietnamese culture and, to some extent, the anthropological approach. Yet a dependence on Scripture and tradition still dominates the order of service and most of the worship practices. Thus the practices involved with VCF's occasional services primarily reflect the

translational model – with some influence from the anthropological model in the practices related to prayer, praise, and the conduct of occasional services.

Implications

It was hoped that the study of these contextualized practices might produce two outcomes: (1) the enhancement of ministry to the growing population of Christian and non-Christian Vietnamese in the U.S. and (2) the facilitation of appropriately contextualized ministry to Vietnamese abroad. Indeed, certain implications of this study address such issues.

Recommended Practices

First, the study recommends certain practices which were found to be examples of appropriate contextualization in the worship of Vietnamese Protestant churches of the Greater Ohio Valley Region. Among these, the study particularly recommends practices such as: (1) sermons which draw illustrations from elements of Vietnamese culture without treating culture as a *primary* theological locus, (2) the practice of *Ôn Kinh Thánh* or “Bible Review,” (3) the use of responsive readings, (4) the use of the Vietnamese language, of course, along with code-switching strategies if appropriate (5) an emphasis on thanksgiving in prayer, praise, and other worship elements, (5) an inclusion of occasional services such as *Tết* and Vietnamese Memorial Day, (6) an emphasis on prayer and, (7) the use of praise music composed by Vietnamese Christians.

Though the overall approach in these churches was not intentionally countercultural, most pastors in our study placed particular emphasis on

addressing issues related to idolatry and ancestor worship in their sermons. Though the study did not find any evidence of ancestor worship among the congregants in any church, anecdotal evidence arose indicating that such practices sometimes occur among Vietnamese Christians outside those congregations who congregants say “have not been properly instructed” concerning the faith. Though such practices would more likely appear in *private/family devotions* rather than the public worship addressed in this study, the information gathered in this study implies that pastors are well advised to frequently focus on issues related to idolatry and ancestor worship in their proclamation and other elements of *public worship*.

In preaching, it is also important to remember the Vietnamese conception that “the consequences of sin are discord between people and the spiritual realm, discord in social relations, etc” (Trinh, 130). Proclamation which focuses on salvation as “reconciliation with God” rather than merely “justification before God” will more likely resonate with the Vietnamese worldview. The theme of thanksgiving is so prevalent in both Vietnamese culture (proverbs, etc.) and in Vietnamese Christian practices (in prayer, celebrations of *Tết* and Vietnamese Memorial Day, etc.), that emphasizing thankfulness may also be helpful in presenting Christianity in a “more Vietnamese” way.

The *Ôn Kinh Thánh* practice used in the Vietnamese United Methodist churches provides a means of education concerning these and other important topics as well. Even when a sermon is presented in the appropriate language, it can be difficult to follow for those who have little background in the culture and

history described in the Bible. Therefore, this time of guided discussion is very helpful for people who have been primarily influenced by a predominantly non-Christian culture – and thus may have very little knowledge of the Scriptures. Similarly, the use of responsive readings also enhances the congregants' familiarity with Scripture.

With respect to language usage, the best policy is nearly always to minister to Vietnamese people directly in the Vietnamese language. But when a translator *is* used, the speaker should be careful to allow significant time for the translation of each utterance since the congregation's relatively low level of Bible knowledge may necessitate additional explanation (as the translator in the Vietnamese Baptist Church at Bowling Green informed us). Of course, as these churches accumulate higher percentages of second- and third-generation Vietnamese Americans (and perhaps, non-Vietnamese) congregants, some accommodation must be planned for communicating the gospel more effectively to them. Such strategies may include (1) significant use of code-switching during the service, (2) the use of audio equipment such earphones which allow the congregant to hear the service in English, or even (3) the provision of an entirely separate service – conducted at least mostly in English.

Finally, the study recommends the use of praise music written and composed by Vietnamese Christians. Translation of the lyrics of western hymns may often be appropriate; however, the use of the melodies of existing western hymns with their respective lyrics may need to be abandoned. The tonal contours of the Vietnamese language should be allowed to send the melodies in whatever

direction they may - along the pentatonic scales. This will retain the theological appropriateness of the lyrics and also provide a more distinctively Asian sound.

Questionable Practices

With respect to the conduct of occasional services, it is not recommended that such occasions always be observed in exactly the ways demonstrated by all of these churches. For instance, the use of “lucky money” during *Tết* can not be endorsed unless the congregants detach the superstitious beliefs normally associated with it. It is difficult to imagine that congregants would easily be able to dissociate the superstition connected with this practice – particularly, in Vietnam itself. Yet the westernizing effects exerted on immigrants into the United States should not be underestimated – and the influences of globalization suggest that even the people of Vietnam are not immune to such effects. However, the practice (in the Vietnamese Memphis church) of using *Kinh Thánh* verses instead of “lucky money” seems a much wiser course of action to avoid syncretism.

The study also identified worship practices which (though some met the criteria for appropriate contextualization) have potential to cause confusion when observed or heard by non-Christians. The first practice involves the translation of a western song/hymn into Vietnamese while retaining the original melody/harmony. The study demonstrated that the conflict between the tonal aspect of the language and melodic movement in a hymn or song can result in nearly a complete alteration of the message communicated to the listener (as with the translation of “Send the Light”).

This problem might be solved by the use of *đọc kinh* (also called *bài ca nguyên*) chanting such as that found in Vietnamese Catholic churches. Such a choice would completely remove the necessity for identifying lyrics which do not conflict with the original western melody yet convey equivalent meanings. However, the use of *đọc kinh* may also be unnecessarily offensive to many Vietnamese Protestants because of its association with Roman Catholic practice or because of its similarity to the Buddhist practice of *tụng kinh*. The best solution, as mentioned above, is to expand the present corpus of Vietnamese worship music written by Vietnamese composers/lyricists and promote its use both among Vietnamese congregations in the United States and overseas.

Thus the results of this study offer the aforementioned timely examples of appropriately contextualized worship practices (such as *Ôn Kinh Thánh*, code-switching, etc.) which may be replicated in other similar milieus – as well as examples of practices which should be avoided (such as *đọc kinh*, the use of “lucky money,” etc.)

Diaspora Missiology

The last few decades have been characterized by a marked increase in both the frequency and numbers of people groups involved in migration either within or across national borders. The Vietnamese diaspora precipitated by the fall of Saigon and subsequent political and military changes in Vietnam exemplifies such activity. These “dispersions” of people groups have facilitated interest in developing strategies which allow churches, missions agencies and others to appropriately respond to this phenomenon. With that goal in mind, “diaspora

missiology” has become an important discussion among members of the missiological community.

While the recent growth of Christianity - for instance, in Africa and South America - has shifted the center of Christianity to the “global south,” the migration trends of people groups are from south to north and from east to west (as evidenced in the Vietnamese diaspora). Enoch Wan, president of the Evangelical Missiology Society, asserts that these facts lead us to approach diaspora missiology differently than traditional missiology (Wan, 48). The goal, of course, is not that traditional missiology should be abandoned but rather that diaspora missiology be pursued in such a way as to facilitate ministry among people living outside their countries of origin.

This goal can be realized through the synergistic activity of many people and organizations with a common focus. The approach attempts to resolve the tension between “saving souls” and the “social gospel” by integrating those concerns into its missions strategy. For instance, Wan argues that “we cannot just start a local church among refugees without also addressing their physical needs and becoming their advocate” (Wan, 50). Also, missions to diasporic groups is “de-territorialized” – that is, not focused on or within national borders, neither “regional” nor “global.” (Indeed, a diaspora mission may not be located in any specific geographic region. Since a significant number of Filipinos are involved with the maritime industry, a number of Filipino churches have successfully been planted aboard seagoing vessels in the last few years).

The diaspora phenomenon holds new challenges and fresh opportunities for the conduct of missions both now and in the years ahead. These and other strategies which have arisen from diaspora missiology hold great promise for the future of missions *to* diasporic peoples and *through* diasporic peoples.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study included only a small number of churches in one region of the United States. (It may be that other regions have different practices which reflect differences in their surrounding subcultures, etc.). Additional studies are therefore recommended in other parts of the United States and Canada – and if possible, in Vietnam.

The study also looked at a very limited number of worship songs. Given the effect of the tonal aspect conflict on hymn melodies, a potential for miscommunication of the gospel exists in the vast majority of hymns found in the *Thánh Ca*. A study could be undertaken to investigate what overall effect this problem has had on the clarity and theological integrity of various songs in the *Thánh Ca*. Also, since contemporary music is currently being translated in the same manner, it presents another (possibly, more important) area where study is recommended.

Finally, the translation of the *Kinh Thánh* most often used by the Vietnamese churches in this study reflects a low level of contextualization. Partly, this is because of its age. Just as some contemporary English-speaking readers do not understand certain words in the King James Version, some Vietnamese church members (particularly, the younger ones) do not understand

many of the Vietnamese words in the *Kinh Thánh*. A study could be pursued which would identify problem areas and suggest strategies for the development of better translations.²²³

It is my earnest hope that the wise consideration of these conclusions, implications, and recommendations will enable us to make the best use of the missiological opportunities connected with the increased access of Christian witness to the Vietnamese - in the United States, in Vietnam and wherever the Vietnamese people may be found in this world.

Tôn Vinh Chân Thần!

²²³ Indeed, such work has been underway on this front for several years. A new and better-contextualized translation of the New Testament was completed by Reverend Bau Dang, a Vietnamese clergyman in California. Work on the Old Testament is currently in progress.

APPENDIX I – LIST OF CHURCHES IN THIS STUDY

United Methodist

Dayton Vietnamese UMC
140 Stonemill Rd.
Dayton, OH 45409
614-771-9645

Pastor: Esther Dang

Columbus Vietnamese UMC
501 E. Broad St.
Columbus, OH 43215
614-221-4571

Pastor: Esther Dang

Baptist

Vietnamese Baptist Church
4431 Yale Rd.
Memphis, TN 38128
901-937-1788
<http://www.vnbaptist.net/memphis/index.html>

Pastor: Doug Kellum

First Vietnamese Baptist Church
7259 Southside Drive
Louisville, KY 40214

Pastor: Hoang The Luc

First Baptist Church (Internat'l Ministry)
621 East 12th Avenue
Bowling Green, KY 42101
270-842-0331 or toll free 1-877-476-9750
<http://www.firstbaptistbg.org/>

Pastor: Hoang The Luc
Coordinator: Pat Gutierrez

Evangelical Free Church of America

Vietnamese Christian Fellowship
901 Woodbriar Rd.
Knoxville, TN 37923
865-670-7585

Pastor: David Mai

APPENDIX II – ORDER OF SUNDAY WORSHIP
USING THE BASIC PATTERN
(EXCERPTED FROM THE UNITED METHODIST HYMNAL)

This order shows the variety which is possible within the basic pattern of worship. It is a guide for those who plan worship not an order to be followed by the congregation. The congregation may be guided through the service by a bulletin or by announcement, whether or not Holy Communion is celebrated. This order is the basis for the following forms of service for congregations that wish to use this book for all or part of the service of Holy Communion.

ENTRANCE

GATHERING

The people come together in the Lord's name. While they are gathering, on or more of the following may take place:

- Informal greetings, conversation, and fellowship
- Announcements and welcoming
- Rehearsal of congregational music and other acts of worship
- Informal prayer, singing, testimony
- Quiet meditation or private prayer
- Organ or other instrumental or vocal music

GREETING AND HYMN

Facing the people, the leader greets them in the Lord's name. Scripture sentences and responsive acts between the leader and people declare that the Lord is present and empowers our worship. The hymn may precede or follow the greeting

OPENING PRAYERS AND PRAISE

One or more of the following may be spoken or sung:

- Prayer of the day, such as a collect
- Prayer of confession and act of pardon
- Litany, such as "Lord, Have Mercy"

If an act of praise is desired, one or more of the following may be spoken or sung:

- A "Glory to God in the Highest"
- A psalm or other scripture song
- The Gloria Patri
- An anthem

PROCLAMATION AND RESPONSE

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

The blessing of the Holy Spirit is invoked upon the reading, preaching, hearing, and doing of the Word. This may be included with the opening prayers, if there has not been an act of praise.

SCRIPTURE

Two or three Scripture readings should be used. If there are not Old Testament, epistle, and Gospel readings at each service, care should be taken that over a period of time the people hear representative readings from each.

The Scripture readings may be interspersed with:

A psalm or psalm portions, sung or spoken, after the first reading

A hymn or song related to the Scriptures of the day, or a sung alleluia, before the final reading

SERMON

One or more of the Scripture readings is interpreted.

RESPONSE TO THE WORD

Responses may include one or more of the following:

Invitation to Christian discipleship, followed by a hymn of invitation or of response, or a baptism or confirmation hymn

Appropriate portions of the Baptismal Covenant:

Holy Baptism

Confirmation

Reaffirmation of faith

Reception into the United Methodist Church

Reception into the Local Congregation

A creed, except when already used in the Baptismal Covenant

CONCERNS AND PRAYERS

Joys and concerns to be included in the prayers may be expressed.

Prayer may take one or more of these forms:

Brief intercessions, petitions, and thanksgivings by the leader or members of the congregation. Each of these prayers may be followed by a common response, such as, "Lord, hear our prayer," spoken or sung by all.

Litany of intercession and petition

Pastoral prayer

During this time persons may be invited to kneel at the communion rail.

CONFESSION, PARDON, AND PEACE

A prayer of confession and act of pardon are used here, if not during the entrance.

The people may offer one another signs of reconciliation and love, particularly when Holy Communion is celebrated.

OFFERING

An offering may include:

Monetary gifts

Other appropriate gifts, such as memorial gifts or other items to be dedicated

The bread and wine, if Holy Communion is to follow

As the gifts are received and presented, there may be:

A hymn

An anthem

A doxology or other musical response

THANKSGIVING

WITH HOLY COMMUNION

The pastor prepares the bread and cup.

The pastor and people join in the Great Thanksgiving.

All pray the Lord's Prayer.

The pastor breaks the bread and lifts the cup.

The bread and cup are given to the people.

The congregation may sing hymns.

The table is set in order.

There may be a brief prayer.

WITHOUT HOLY COMMUNION

A prayer of thanksgiving is offered.

All pray the Lord's Prayer.

SENDING FORTH

HYMN OR SONG AND DISMISSAL WITH BLESSING

Facing the people, the leader declares God's blessing.
The hymn may precede or follow the blessing.

GOING FORTH

One or more of the following may be included:

Organ or other instrumental voluntary

Silence before the congregation disperses

Informal greetings, conversation, and fellowship

APPENDIX III THE BAPTIST FAITH AND MESSAGE

I. The Scriptures

The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. It reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation.

Exodus 24:4; Deuteronomy 4:1-2; 17:19; Joshua 8:34; Psalms 19:7-10; 119:11,89,105,140; Isaiah 34:16; 40:8; Jeremiah 15:16; 36:1-32; Matthew 5:17-18; 22:29; Luke 21:33; 24:44-46; John 5:39; 16:13-15; 17:17; Acts 2:16ff.; 17:11; Romans 15:4; 16:25-26; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Hebrews 1:1-2; 4:12; 1 Peter 1:25; 2 Peter 1:19-21.

II. God

There is one and only one living and true God. He is an intelligent, spiritual, and personal Being, the Creator, Redeemer, Preserver, and Ruler of the universe. God is infinite in holiness and all other perfections. God is all powerful and all knowing; and His perfect knowledge extends to all things, past, present, and future, including the future decisions of His free creatures. To Him we owe the highest love, reverence, and obedience. The eternal triune God reveals Himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence, or being.

A. God the Father

God as Father reigns with providential care over His universe, His creatures, and the flow of the stream of human history according to the purposes of His grace. He is all powerful, all knowing, all loving, and all wise. God is Father in truth to those who become children of God through faith in Jesus Christ. He is fatherly in His attitude toward all men.

Genesis 1:1; 2:7; Exodus 3:14; 6:2-3; 15:11ff.; 20:1ff.; Leviticus 22:2; Deuteronomy 6:4; 32:6; 1 Chronicles 29:10; Psalm 19:1-3; Isaiah 43:3,15; 64:8; Jeremiah 10:10; 17:13; Matthew 6:9ff.; 7:11; 23:9; 28:19; Mark 1:9-11; John 4:24; 5:26; 14:6-13; 17:1-8; Acts 1:7; Romans 8:14-15; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 4:6; Colossians 1:15; 1 Timothy 1:17; Hebrews 11:6; 12:9; 1 Peter 1:17; 1 John 5:7.

B. God the Son

Christ is the eternal Son of God. In His incarnation as Jesus Christ He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. Jesus perfectly revealed and did the will of God, taking upon Himself human nature with its demands and necessities and identifying Himself completely with mankind yet without sin. He honored the divine law by His personal obedience, and in His substitutionary death on the cross He made provision for the redemption of men from sin. He was raised from the dead with a glorified body and appeared to His disciples as the person who was with them before His crucifixion. He ascended into heaven and is now exalted at the right hand of God where He is the One Mediator, fully God, fully man, in whose Person is effected the reconciliation between God and man. He will return in power and glory to judge the world and to consummate His redemptive mission. He now dwells in all believers as the living and ever present Lord.

Genesis 18:1ff.; Psalms 2:7ff.; 110:1ff.; Isaiah 7:14; 53; Matthew 1:18-23; 3:17; 8:29; 11:27; 14:33; 16:16,27; 17:5; 27; 28:1-6,19; Mark 1:1; 3:11; Luke 1:35; 4:41; 22:70; 24:46; John 1:1-18,29; 10:30,38; 11:25-27; 12:44-50; 14:7-11; 16:15-16,28; 17:1-5, 21-22; 20:1-20,28; Acts 1:9; 2:22-24; 7:55-56; 9:4-5,20; Romans 1:3-4; 3:23-26; 5:6-21; 8:1-3,34; 10:4; 1 Corinthians 1:30; 2:2; 8:6; 15:1-8,24-28; 2 Corinthians 5:19-21; 8:9; Galatians 4:4-5; Ephesians 1:20; 3:11; 4:7-10; Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 1:13-22; 2:9; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18; 1 Timothy 2:5-6; 3:16; Titus 2:13-14; Hebrews 1:1-3; 4:14-15; 7:14-28; 9:12-15,24-28; 12:2; 13:8; 1 Peter 2:21-25; 3:22; 1 John 1:7-9; 3:2; 4:14-15; 5:9; 2 John 7-9; Revelation 1:13-16; 5:9-14; 12:10-11; 13:8; 19:16.

C. God the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God, fully divine. He inspired holy men of old to write the Scriptures. Through illumination He enables men to understand truth. He exalts Christ. He convicts men of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. He calls men to the Saviour, and effects regeneration. At the moment of regeneration He baptizes every believer into the Body of Christ. He cultivates Christian character, comforts believers, and bestows the spiritual gifts by which they serve God through His church. He seals the believer unto the day of final redemption. His presence in the Christian is the guarantee that God will bring the believer into the fullness of the stature of Christ. He enlightens and empowers the believer and the church in worship, evangelism, and service.

Genesis 1:2; Judges 14:6; Job 26:13; Psalms 51:11; 139:7ff.; Isaiah 61:1-3; Joel 2:28-32; Matthew 1:18; 3:16; 4:1; 12:28-32; 28:19; Mark 1:10,12; Luke 1:35; 4:1,18-19; 11:13; 12:12; 24:49; John 4:24; 14:16-17,26; 15:26; 16:7-14; Acts 1:8; 2:1-4,38; 4:31; 5:3; 6:3; 7:55; 8:17,39; 10:44; 13:2; 15:28; 16:6; 19:1-6; Romans 8:9-11,14-16,26-27; 1 Corinthians 2:10-14; 3:16; 12:3-11,13; Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 1:13-14; 4:30; 5:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:19; 1 Timothy 3:16; 4:1;

2 Timothy 1:14; 3:16; Hebrews 9:8,14; 2 Peter 1:21; 1 John 4:13; 5:6-7; Revelation 1:10; 22:17.

III. Man

Man is the special creation of God, made in His own image. He created them male and female as the crowning work of His creation. The gift of gender is thus part of the goodness of God's creation. In the beginning man was innocent of sin and was endowed by his Creator with freedom of choice. By his free choice man sinned against God and brought sin into the human race. Through the temptation of Satan man transgressed the command of God, and fell from his original innocence whereby his posterity inherit a nature and an environment inclined toward sin. Therefore, as soon as they are capable of moral action, they become transgressors and are under condemnation. Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship and enable man to fulfill the creative purpose of God. The sacredness of human personality is evident in that God created man in His own image, and in that Christ died for man; therefore, every person of every race possesses full dignity and is worthy of respect and Christian love.

Genesis 1:26-30; 2:5,7,18-22; 3; 9:6; Psalms 1; 8:3-6; 32:1-5; 51:5; Isaiah 6:5; Jeremiah 17:5; Matthew 16:26; Acts 17:26-31; Romans 1:19-32; 3:10-18,23; 5:6,12,19; 6:6; 7:14-25; 8:14-18,29; 1 Corinthians 1:21-31; 15:19,21-22; Ephesians 2:1-22; Colossians 1:21-22; 3:9-11.

IV. Salvation

Salvation involves the redemption of the whole man, and is offered freely to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, who by His own blood obtained eternal redemption for the believer. In its broadest sense salvation includes regeneration, justification, sanctification, and glorification. There is no salvation apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord.

A. Regeneration, or the new birth, is a work of God's grace whereby believers become new creatures in Christ Jesus. It is a change of heart wrought by the Holy Spirit through conviction of sin, to which the sinner responds in repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Repentance and faith are inseparable experiences of grace.

Repentance is a genuine turning from sin toward God. Faith is the acceptance of Jesus Christ and commitment of the entire personality to Him as Lord and Saviour.

B. Justification is God's gracious and full acquittal upon principles of His righteousness of all sinners who repent and believe in Christ. Justification brings the believer unto a relationship of peace and favor with God.

C. Sanctification is the experience, beginning in regeneration, by which the believer is set apart to God's purposes, and is enabled to progress toward moral and spiritual maturity through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. Growth in grace should continue throughout the regenerate person's life.

D. Glorification is the culmination of salvation and is the final blessed and abiding state of the redeemed.

Genesis 3:15; Exodus 3:14-17; 6:2-8; Matthew 1:21; 4:17; 16:21-26; 27:22-28:6; Luke 1:68-69; 2:28-32; John 1:11-14,29; 3:3-21,36; 5:24; 10:9,28-29; 15:1-16; 17:17; Acts 2:21; 4:12; 15:11; 16:30-31; 17:30-31; 20:32; Romans 1:16-18; 2:4; 3:23-25; 4:3ff.; 5:8-10; 6:1-23; 8:1-18,29-39; 10:9-10,13; 13:11-14; 1 Corinthians 1:18,30; 6:19-20; 15:10; 2 Corinthians 5:17-20; Galatians 2:20; 3:13; 5:22-25; 6:15; Ephesians 1:7; 2:8-22; 4:11-16; Philippians 2:12-13; Colossians 1:9-22; 3:1ff.; 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24; 2 Timothy 1:12; Titus 2:11-14; Hebrews 2:1-3; 5:8-9; 9:24-28; 11:1-12:8,14; James 2:14-26; 1 Peter 1:2-3; 1 John 1:6-2:11; Revelation 3:20; 21:1-22:5.

V. God's Purpose of Grace

Election is the gracious purpose of God, according to which He regenerates, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies sinners. It is consistent with the free agency of man, and comprehends all the means in connection with the end. It is the glorious display of God's sovereign goodness, and is infinitely wise, holy, and unchangeable. It excludes boasting and promotes humility.

All true believers endure to the end. Those whom God has accepted in Christ, and sanctified by His Spirit, will never fall away from the state of grace, but shall persevere to the end. Believers may fall into sin through neglect and temptation, whereby they grieve the Spirit, impair their graces and comforts, and bring reproach on the cause of Christ and temporal judgments on themselves; yet they shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

Genesis 12:1-3; Exodus 19:5-8; 1 Samuel 8:4-7,19-22; Isaiah 5:1-7; Jeremiah 31:31ff.; Matthew 16:18-19; 21:28-45; 24:22,31; 25:34; Luke 1:68-79; 2:29-32; 19:41-44; 24:44-48; John 1:12-14; 3:16; 5:24; 6:44-45,65; 10:27-29; 15:16; 17:6,12,17-18; Acts 20:32; Romans 5:9-10; 8:28-39; 10:12-15; 11:5-7,26-36; 1 Corinthians 1:1-2; 15:24-28; Ephesians 1:4-23; 2:1-10; 3:1-11; Colossians 1:12-14; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; 2 Timothy 1:12; 2:10,19; Hebrews 11:39-12:2; James 1:12; 1 Peter 1:2-5,13; 2:4-10; 1 John 1:7-9; 2:19; 3:2.

VI. The Church

A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the two ordinances of Christ, governed by His

laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes. In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord. Its scriptural officers are pastors and deacons. While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.

The New Testament speaks also of the church as the Body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all the ages, believers from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation.

Matthew 16:15-19; 18:15-20; Acts 2:41-42,47; 5:11-14; 6:3-6; 13:1-3; 14:23,27; 15:1-30; 16:5; 20:28; Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 3:16; 5:4-5; 7:17; 9:13-14; 12; Ephesians 1:22-23; 2:19-22; 3:8-11,21; 5:22-32; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:18; 1 Timothy 2:9-14; 3:1-15; 4:14; Hebrews 11:39-40; 1 Peter 5:1-4; Revelation 2-3; 21:2-3.

VII. Baptism and the Lord's Supper

Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer's faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Saviour, the believer's death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. It is a testimony to his faith in the final resurrection of the dead. Being a church ordinance, it is prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper is a symbolic act of obedience whereby members of the church, through partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine, memorialize the death of the Redeemer and anticipate His second coming.

Matthew 3:13-17; 26:26-30; 28:19-20; Mark 1:9-11; 14:22-26; Luke 3:21-22; 22:19-20; John 3:23; Acts 2:41-42; 8:35-39; 16:30-33; 20:7; Romans 6:3-5; 1 Corinthians 10:16,21; 11:23-29; Colossians 2:12.

VIII. The Lord's Day

The first day of the week is the Lord's Day. It is a Christian institution for regular observance. It commemorates the resurrection of Christ from the dead and should include exercises of worship and spiritual devotion, both public and private. Activities on the Lord's Day should be commensurate with the Christian's conscience under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Exodus 20:8-11; Matthew 12:1-12; 28:1ff.; Mark 2:27-28; 16:1-7; Luke 24:1-3,33-36; John 4:21-24; 20:1,19-28; Acts 20:7; Romans 14:5-10; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2; Colossians 2:16; 3:16; Revelation 1:10.

IX. The Kingdom

The Kingdom of God includes both His general sovereignty over the universe and His particular kingship over men who willfully acknowledge Him as King. Particularly the Kingdom is the realm of salvation into which men enter by trustful, childlike commitment to Jesus Christ. Christians ought to pray and to labor that the Kingdom may come and God's will be done on earth. The full consummation of the Kingdom awaits the return of Jesus Christ and the end of this age.

Genesis 1:1; Isaiah 9:6-7; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Matthew 3:2; 4:8-10,23; 12:25-28; 13:1-52; 25:31-46; 26:29; Mark 1:14-15; 9:1; Luke 4:43; 8:1; 9:2; 12:31-32; 17:20-21; 23:42; John 3:3; 18:36; Acts 1:6-7; 17:22-31; Romans 5:17; 8:19; 1 Corinthians 15:24-28; Colossians 1:13; Hebrews 11:10,16; 12:28; 1 Peter 2:4-10; 4:13; Revelation 1:6,9; 5:10; 11:15; 21-22.

X. Last Things

God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring the world to its appropriate end. According to His promise, Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth; the dead will be raised; and Christ will judge all men in righteousness. The unrighteous will be consigned to Hell, the place of everlasting punishment. The righteous in their resurrected and glorified bodies will receive their reward and will dwell forever in Heaven with the Lord.

Isaiah 2:4; 11:9; Matthew 16:27; 18:8-9; 19:28; 24:27,30,36,44; 25:31-46; 26:64; Mark 8:38; 9:43-48; Luke 12:40,48; 16:19-26; 17:22-37; 21:27-28; John 14:1-3; Acts 1:11; 17:31; Romans 14:10; 1 Corinthians 4:5; 15:24-28,35-58; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Philippians 3:20-21; Colossians 1:5; 3:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18; 5:1ff.; 2 Thessalonians 1:7ff.; 2; 1 Timothy 6:14; 2 Timothy 4:1,8; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 9:27-28; James 5:8; 2 Peter 3:7ff.; 1 John 2:28; 3:2; Jude 14; Revelation 1:18; 3:11; 20:1-22:13.

XI. Evangelism and Missions

It is the duty and privilege of every follower of Christ and of every church of the Lord Jesus Christ to endeavor to make disciples of all nations. The new birth of man's spirit by God's Holy Spirit means the birth of love for others. Missionary effort on the part of all rests thus upon a spiritual necessity of the regenerate life, and is expressly and repeatedly commanded in the teachings of Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ has commanded the preaching of the gospel to all nations. It is the duty of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by verbal

witness undergirded by a Christian lifestyle, and by other methods in harmony with the gospel of Christ.

Genesis 12:1-3; Exodus 19:5-6; Isaiah 6:1-8; Matthew 9:37-38; 10:5-15; 13:18-30, 37-43; 16:19; 22:9-10; 24:14; 28:18-20; Luke 10:1-18; 24:46-53; John 14:11-12; 15:7-8,16; 17:15; 20:21; Acts 1:8; 2; 8:26-40; 10:42-48; 13:2-3; Romans 10:13-15; Ephesians 3:1-11; 1 Thessalonians 1:8; 2 Timothy 4:5; Hebrews 2:1-3; 11:39-12:2; 1 Peter 2:4-10; Revelation 22:17.

XII. Education

Christianity is the faith of enlightenment and intelligence. In Jesus Christ abide all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. All sound learning is, therefore, a part of our Christian heritage. The new birth opens all human faculties and creates a thirst for knowledge. Moreover, the cause of education in the Kingdom of Christ is co-ordinate with the causes of missions and general benevolence, and should receive along with these the liberal support of the churches. An adequate system of Christian education is necessary to a complete spiritual program for Christ's people.

In Christian education there should be a proper balance between academic freedom and academic responsibility. Freedom in any orderly relationship of human life is always limited and never absolute. The freedom of a teacher in a Christian school, college, or seminary is limited by the pre-eminence of Jesus Christ, by the authoritative nature of the Scriptures, and by the distinct purpose for which the school exists.

Deuteronomy 4:1,5,9,14; 6:1-10; 31:12-13; Nehemiah 8:1-8; Job 28:28; Psalms 19:7ff.; 119:11; Proverbs 3:13ff.; 4:1-10; 8:1-7,11; 15:14; Ecclesiastes 7:19; Matthew 5:2; 7:24ff.; 28:19-20; Luke 2:40; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; Ephesians 4:11-16; Philippians 4:8; Colossians 2:3,8-9; 1 Timothy 1:3-7; 2 Timothy 2:15; 3:14-17; Hebrews 5:12-6:3; James 1:5; 3:17.

XIII. Stewardship

God is the source of all blessings, temporal and spiritual; all that we have and are we owe to Him. Christians have a spiritual debtorship to the whole world, a holy trusteeship in the gospel, and a binding stewardship in their possessions. They are therefore under obligation to serve Him with their time, talents, and material possessions; and should recognize all these as entrusted to them to use for the glory of God and for helping others. According to the Scriptures, Christians should contribute of their means cheerfully, regularly, systematically, proportionately, and liberally for the advancement of the Redeemer's cause on earth.

Genesis 14:20; Leviticus 27:30-32; Deuteronomy 8:18; Malachi 3:8-12; Matthew 6:1-4,19-21; 19:21; 23:23; 25:14-29; Luke 12:16-21,42; 16:1-13; Acts 2:44-47; 5:1-11; 17:24-25; 20:35; Romans 6:6-22; 12:1-2; 1 Corinthians 4:1-2; 6:19-20; 12; 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8-9; 12:15; Philippians 4:10-19; 1 Peter 1:18-19.

XIV. Cooperation

Christ's people should, as occasion requires, organize such associations and conventions as may best secure cooperation for the great objects of the Kingdom of God. Such organizations have no authority over one another or over the churches. They are voluntary and advisory bodies designed to elicit, combine, and direct the energies of our people in the most effective manner. Members of New Testament churches should cooperate with one another in carrying forward the missionary, educational, and benevolent ministries for the extension of Christ's Kingdom. Christian unity in the New Testament sense is spiritual harmony and voluntary cooperation for common ends by various groups of Christ's people. Cooperation is desirable between the various Christian denominations, when the end to be attained is itself justified, and when such cooperation involves no violation of conscience or compromise of loyalty to Christ and His Word as revealed in the New Testament.

Exodus 17:12; 18:17ff.; Judges 7:21; Ezra 1:3-4; 2:68-69; 5:14-15; Nehemiah 4; 8:1-5; Matthew 10:5-15; 20:1-16; 22:1-10; 28:19-20; Mark 2:3; Luke 10:1ff.; Acts 1:13-14; 2:1ff.; 4:31-37; 13:2-3; 15:1-35; 1 Corinthians 1:10-17; 3:5-15; 12; 2 Corinthians 8-9; Galatians 1:6-10; Ephesians 4:1-16; Philippians 1:15-18.

XV. The Christian and the Social Order

All Christians are under obligation to seek to make the will of Christ supreme in our own lives and in human society. Means and methods used for the improvement of society and the establishment of righteousness among men can be truly and permanently helpful only when they are rooted in the regeneration of the individual by the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ. In the spirit of Christ, Christians should oppose racism, every form of greed, selfishness, and vice, and all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality, and pornography. We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death. Every Christian should seek to bring industry, government, and society as a whole under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth, and brotherly love. In order to promote these ends Christians should be ready to work with all men of good will in any good cause, always being careful to act in the spirit of love without compromising their loyalty to Christ and His truth.

Exodus 20:3-17; Leviticus 6:2-5; Deuteronomy 10:12; 27:17; Psalm 101:5; Micah 6:8; Zechariah 8:16; Matthew 5:13-16,43-48; 22:36-40; 25:35; Mark

1:29-34; 2:3ff.; 10:21; Luke 4:18-21; 10:27-37; 20:25; John 15:12; 17:15; Romans 12-14; 1Corinthians 5:9-10; 6:1-7; 7:20-24; 10:23-11:1; Galatians 3:26-28; Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 3:12-17; 1 Thessalonians 3:12; Philemon; James 1:27; 2:8.

XVI. Peace and War

It is the duty of Christians to seek peace with all men on principles of righteousness. In accordance with the spirit and teachings of Christ they should do all in their power to put an end to war.

The true remedy for the war spirit is the gospel of our Lord. The supreme need of the world is the acceptance of His teachings in all the affairs of men and nations, and the practical application of His law of love. Christian people throughout the world should pray for the reign of the Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 2:4; Matthew 5:9,38-48; 6:33; 26:52; Luke 22:36,38; Romans 12:18-19; 13:1-7; 14:19; Hebrews 12:14; James 4:1-2.

XVII. Religious Liberty

God alone is Lord of the conscience, and He has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are contrary to His Word or not contained in it. Church and state should be separate. The state owes to every church protection and full freedom in the pursuit of its spiritual ends. In providing for such freedom no ecclesiastical group or denomination should be favored by the state more than others. Civil government being ordained of God, it is the duty of Christians to render loyal obedience thereto in all things not contrary to the revealed will of God. The church should not resort to the civil power to carry on its work. The gospel of Christ contemplates spiritual means alone for the pursuit of its ends. The state has no right to impose penalties for religious opinions of any kind. The state has no right to impose taxes for the support of any form of religion. A free church in a free state is the Christian ideal, and this implies the right of free and unhindered access to God on the part of all men, and the right to form and propagate opinions in the sphere of religion without interference by the civil power.

Genesis 1:27; 2:7; Matthew 6:6-7,24; 16:26; 22:21; John 8:36; Acts 4:19-20; Romans 6:1-2; 13:1-7; Galatians 5:1,13; Philippians 3:20; 1 Timothy 2:1-2; James 4:12; 1 Peter 2:12-17; 3:11-17; 4:12-19.

XVIII. The Family

God has ordained the family as the foundational institution of human society. It is composed of persons related to one another by marriage, blood, or adoption.

Marriage is the uniting of one man and one woman in covenant commitment for a lifetime. It is God's unique gift to reveal the union between Christ and His church and to provide for the man and the woman in marriage the framework for intimate companionship, the channel of sexual expression according to biblical standards, and the means for procreation of the human race.

The husband and wife are of equal worth before God, since both are created in God's image. The marriage relationship models the way God relates to His people. A husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church. He has the God-given responsibility to provide for, to protect, and to lead his family. A wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband even as the church willingly submits to the headship of Christ. She, being in the image of God as is her husband and thus equal to him, has the God-given responsibility to respect her husband and to serve as his helper in managing the household and nurturing the next generation.

Children, from the moment of conception, are a blessing and heritage from the Lord. Parents are to demonstrate to their children God's pattern for marriage. Parents are to teach their children spiritual and moral values and to lead them, through consistent lifestyle example and loving discipline, to make choices based on biblical truth. Children are to honor and obey their parents.

Genesis 1:26-28; 2:15-25; 3:1-20; Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Joshua 24:15; 1 Samuel 1:26-28; Psalms 51:5; 78:1-8; 127; 128; 139:13-16; Proverbs 1:8; 5:15-20; 6:20-22; 12:4; 13:24; 14:1; 17:6; 18:22; 22:6,15; 23:13-14; 24:3; 29:15,17; 31:10-31; Ecclesiastes 4:9-12; 9:9; Malachi 2:14-16; Matthew 5:31-32; 18:2-5; 19:3-9; Mark 10:6-12; Romans 1:18-32; 1 Corinthians 7:1-16; Ephesians 5:21-33; 6:1-4; Colossians 3:18-21; 1 Timothy 5:8,14; 2 Timothy 1:3-5; Titus 2:3-5; Hebrews 13:4; 1 Peter 3:1-7.

APPENDIX IV

DOCTRINAL STATEMENT OF FELLOWSHIP EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH

We believe that there is but one living and true God, who is one in essence, while eternally existing in three distinct personalities: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Though each person of the Godhead possesses the same nature, each functions differently in respect with God's dealing with man (Dt. 6:4).

God the Father We believe the first person of the Trinity orders and directs all things according to His own purpose, pleasure and grace. He created the universe apart from any pre-existing materials and without any means other than His own pure power. He has decreed all things that come to pass for His own glory. He graciously involves Himself in the affairs of men, hears and answers prayer, and saves from sin and death all who come to Him through Jesus Christ (Matt. 6:9; John 5:19-24; Eph. 1:3-6).

God the Son We believe Jesus Christ to be the eternally co-existing Son of God who became fully man without ceasing to be fully God. We believe that He is God's only begotten Son (Jn. 3:16) and our sole Mediator (I Tim. 2:5). We believe in His preexistence (Jn. 1.1), substitutionary atonement (Rom. 3:23-25), His bodily resurrection from the grave (Acts 2:24-27), and His bodily return from heaven (Tit. 2:13). We believe that He is now in heaven exalted at the right hand of the Father, where, as High Priest, He fulfills the ministry of intercession and advocacy for us (Heb. 12:3).

God the Spirit We believe that God the Holy Spirit is that person of the Trinity who restrains evil in the world and convicts men of sin, righteousness, and judgment. He also regenerates those who receive Christ as Savior, baptizes them into the Church, indwells them permanently, intercedes for them in prayer, seals them unto the day of redemption, bestows one or more spiritual gifts on each believer, and empowers those yielded to Him (Matt. 28:19, Jn. 3:3-7, 16:8-11).

The Bible We believe the Bible is the Word of God; verbally inspired by God and inerrant in the original writings, and that it is the supreme, final, and infallible authority in doctrine and practice. By inspiration we mean God's superintendence of human authors so that using their own individual personalities, they composed and recorded without error His revelation to man in the words of the original autographs. We further believe that there is but one method of Bible interpretation-the literal, or historical-grammatical method. This method recognizes the fact that the authors of Scripture meant what they said. Therefore, we consistently apply the rules of grammar, literature, history, and culture to Scripture in order to unlock and understand the author's meaning (Matt. 5:16-18; II Tim. 3:16, 17; II Pet. 1:20, 21).

Man We believe that man was created innocent and in the image and likeness of God, for fellowship with God, but that he sinned bringing forth both physical and spiritual death (which is separation from God) to himself and his posterity. As a consequence, man is now a sinner both by nature and by choice, is alienated from God, and apart from salvation through Jesus Christ is eternally separated from God (Gen. 1:26, 27, 2:17, 3:6, 19; Rom. 3:10-18, 5:12-21; Eph. 2:1-3).

Salvation We believe that salvation is a gift of God and is received by man only through personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. We believe that man is justified by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, apart from human merit, works, or ceremonies (Eph. 2:8-10). We believe that all true believers, “born again” by the Spirit through faith in Christ, are kept secure in Christ forever and will exhibit the present evidence of a transformed life (Jn. 10:27-30; Rom. 8:33-39).

Ordinances We believe that the ordinances of the church are two in number: baptism, by immersion, which is the public identification of the believer with Christ; and the Lord’s Supper, a memorial of the atoning death of Christ until He comes (Matt. 28:19; I Cor. 11:23-24).

The Church We believe the Universal Church, the Body and Bride of Christ, is not an organization but a spiritual organism comprised of all who have expressed saving faith in Jesus Christ as both Savior and Lord. We believe the church began at Pentecost and that a believer is placed into the church by the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit. We believe that the local church is an assembly of professed believers in Jesus Christ who are voluntarily joined together in one locality for the purpose of worship, study of the Word of God, observance of the ordinances, Christian fellowship, and equipping for Christian service. We believe that the local church has the right under Christ to decide and govern its own affairs through the leadership of elders. We believe that it is God’s intention that all believers publicly identify with a visible local assembly (Acts 2:1-4, 2:41-47, 4:19, 5:29; I Cor. 1:1, 2, 5:3-8, 10:32, 12:12-13; Eph. 1:22-23).

Church Government We believe that the terms “elder”, “bishop”, and “pastor” are synonymous in scripture and that the church is to be ruled by a plurality of elders, and that none of these elders is to be of higher “rank”, either in theory or in practice, than the other elders. Some elders may have a teaching gift and may appear more visible, but all authority is in Christ the head with the elders accepting the stewardship of shepherding the flock. Some of these elders may receive financial pay (I Pet. 5:1-2; Acts 14:20; Phil. 1:1, I Tim. 5:17).

Spiritual Gifts We believe that the Holy Spirit gives gifts to every believer to be used for the building up of the body of Christ. These gifts are to be exercised according to biblical guidelines and priorities (Rom. 12:3-8; I Cor. 12,14). We

believe the Holy Spirit is sovereign and may give any gifts He wants at any time He wants (1 Cor. 12:11).

The Gift of Tongues We believe the gift of tongues is a spiritual gift that may be used for cross-cultural evangelism (Acts 2:1-11), private prayer (1 Cor. 14:3, 14-19, 28), or for ministry to the body when an interpreter is present (1 Cor. 14:5). We do not believe everyone must speak in tongues (1 Cor. 12:30).

Future Things We believe in the personal, bodily, premillennial and visible return of Jesus Christ to establish His Kingdom, over which He will reign in righteousness and peace (Is. 9:6-7; 11:2-5).

The Work of the Holy Spirit The work of the Holy Spirit is to manifest the active presence of God in the world and especially in the church. We believe every Christian receives the Holy Spirit at conversion (1 Cor. 12:13; 2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13). Subsequent to conversion, it is essential for every believer to thirst for fresh encounters with the person of the Holy Spirit (John 7:37-39). The Holy Spirit performs many necessary ministries in the believer's life such as: Counselor (John 14:16), Teacher (John 14:26), Revealer of Jesus Christ as Lord (1 Cor. 12:3), Empowerer (Acts 1:8), Guide (Rom. 8:14), Intercessor (Rom. 8:26-27), Giver of Spiritual Gifts (1 Cor. 12:11; 1 Cor. 14), and the One who brings conviction (John 16:8; Acts 7:51), and produces spiritual fruit (Gal. 5:22-25) and spiritual passion (Luke 3:16).

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| Appendix I – List of Churches in the Study | 285 |
| Appendix II – An Order of Sunday Worship (United Methodist hymnal) | 286 |
| Appendix III – The Baptist Faith and Message | 290 |
| Appendix IV – Doctrinal Statement of Fellowship Evangelical Free Church | 300 |
| References Cited & Bibliography | 303 |

